REPORT RESUMES

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FARM LABOR ORGANIZING 1905-1967, A BRIEF HISTORY.

BY- TOONI, LINDA LEWIS AND OTHERS

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AGRICULTURAL LABORERS HAVE BEEN INEFFECTIVE IN ORGANIZING A LABOR UNION. THE NATIONAL LABOR RELATIONS ACT WRITTEN IN 1935 ORIGINALLY HAD PROVISIONS FOR AGRICULTURAL LABORERS, BUT IT WAS DELETED BEFORE FINAL PASSAGE. EARLY ORGANIZING ATTEMPTS OCCURRED IN THE LATE YEARS OF THE 19TH CENTURY WHEN CHINESE IMMIGRANTS ORGANIZED PROTECTIVE ASSOCIATIONS KNOWN AS TONGS. THE WOBBLIES WERE ORGANIZED IN 1905 AS A RESULT OF A MERGER OF MINERS AND LABOR UNIONS. FARM LABOR ORGANIZING DURING THE DEPRESSION YEARS WAS VIRTUALLY NON-EXISTENT, UNTIL 1934, WHEN THE SOUTHERN TENANT FARMERS UNION WAS ORGANIZED IN ARKANSAS, AND ITS ACTIVITIES PROVIDED GREAT IMPETUS TO ALL UNION ORGANIZATION. IN 1946, THE AFL GRANTED A CHARTER TO THE NATIONAL FARM UNION AND THIS UNION IN TURN BECAME THE NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL WORKERS UNION. THE MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM LABOR UNION WAS ORGANIZED IN 1964 AND PROVIDED A BREAKTHROUGH FOR OTHER LABOR UNIONS SUCH AS THE NATIONAL FARM WORKERS ASSOCIATION, UNITED FARM WORKERS ORGANIZING COMMITTEE, AND AGRICULTURAL WORKERS. ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVITIES ARE TAKING PLACE IN CALIFORNIA, LOUISIANA, TEXAS, WISCONSIN, MICHIGAN, FLORIDA, NEW JERSEY, AND NEW YORK. THE AFL-CIO HAS BEEN INSTRUMENTAL IN PROVIDING GUIDANCE AND INITIATIVE TO THESE ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVITIES. (JS)

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Farm Labor Organizing 1905-1967

A Brief History

RC 001 644

Dear Reader:

This pamphlet is presented as a public service to create better understanding of the needs of the poorest and least protected of our working people—the farm workers. We hope that after reading it you will be moved to help these fellow Americans attain equal protection under our laws.

Major credit for the organization, research, and writing of this pamphlet goes to our Assistant Executive Secretary, Linda Lewis Tooni. She received invaluable assistance from Gail Hershberger, our Administrative Assistant. Robin Myers and Anne Montero helped prepare material for several of the chapters. Lena Manderville typed the manuscript. To all of these, we express our deep appreciation.

We are pleased to include statements from prominent Americans on the subject of farm labor organizing. We are grateful for several contributions, especially that of our Committee member J. M. Kaplan, made toward the cost of publishing this report.

The National Advisory Committee on Farm Labor is a nonprofit, voluntary agency of private citizens whose aim is to improve conditions for farm workers. Now at long last, through their own heroic struggles, these workers have achieved a major breakthrough in the Delano grape fields. But farm workers all across the country need the help of all concerned Americans to secure the protection of law in their right to join unions of their choice and to bargain with their employers. Most large growers are organized in their own associations. We believe the same right should be granted to their workers.

Frank P. Graham A. Philip Randolph

Frank P. Graham A. Philip Randolph
Co-Chairmen

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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Farm Labor Organizing 1905-1967

A Brief History

NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON FARM LABOR
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Foreword

by Steve Allen

The United States is the richest nation on earth, presently enjoying the richest moment of its history.

But for all our affluence and charitable impulses the ideal of social justice is far from completely realized in our land. Countless millions live in abject poverty and squalor. The cold-hearted often categorize these poor as worthless people too lazy to work for a living. But in addition to the millions on welfare (less than one per cent of whom are actually employable, according to a recent Presidential study), there are millions, including most farm workers, who work hard yet cannot even afford the basic necessities. The frustrations of these "working poor" should be one of our country's gravest concerns.

Though big-city poverty attracts most public attention, the fact is that 43 per cent of the nation's poverty exists in rural areas. The urban poor have become vocal and attention has at last been attracted to their needs. But the poor of the countryside are for the most part unorganized, isolated, powerless, invisible.

I do not see how this nation can continue to justify the treatment to which our farm workers have long been subjected. These people work at physically exhausting labor for very low pay. Most of them live in disgracefully inadequate quarters and receive little or no medical attention; their children are given a poor substitute for an education.

It was not very many years ago that an American working man could be fired without being given cause or notice, when his salary could be reduced at an employer's whim, when he had to work 10 or 12 hours a day, when young children labored in dangerous factories to earn pennies a day, when workers were beaten and killed if they attempted to organize. Three things were required to change the situation: public indignation, rights of collective bargaining, and civilized legislation.

Americans are rightly proud today of the security now enjoyed by the average working man. But looking back over our shoulders we see that the farm laborer has been left behind in the forward march.

There can be legitimate differences of opinion among reasonable men as regards the best solution to the farm worker's problem. But there can be no justification for those who are simply determined to keep the field-hand in his place, to intimidate or even to ignore him. To become familiar with the information in this pamphlet is to automatically come under a moral obligation.

It is sometimes erroneously supposed that the farm labor problem is serious only in the deep South, or in the Southwest. But the problem is national. While an entire farm family in Texas may work a year and earn only about $1500, things are bad enough in Massachusetts. On a farm north of Boston men put in as many as 14 hours a day, 7 days a week, for 95 cents an hour. They live in shacks with cardboard on the floor. In Rochelle, Illinois, a migrant family of ten was recently "living" in one room with a cement floor and walls and one small window, all surrounded by a sea of mud.

As if their lives were not hard enough, farm laborers must also contend with dangerous hazards. Although they comprise about 7 per cent of the U.S. work force they suffer over 22 per cent of all fatalities from work accidents.

It would be unwise to view the farm labor predicament as a controversy pitting workers against growers and then, on the basis of one's social biases, choose to support one side or the other. Both forces must be supported. Even the wealthiest farmers are faced with a cost-price squeeze and they are certainly as entitled to a profit as employers in any other industry. But that same understanding should be accorded those decent men and women without whose labor the farm owner would be out of business overnight.

A generation ago certain short-sighted representatives of management predicted that economic disaster would follow recognition of the rights and privileges of the working man. Instead American industry today is more powerful and successful than ever. If, as Senator Robert Kennedy has observed, we can plan to put a man on the moon before the end of this decade, surely we can devise a solution to the farm labor problem.

One of the philosophical foundation-stones upon which our civilization is proudly based is the belief that a man is more important than an object, that human rights, in other words, are more important than property rights. Since we proclaim this view to the world it does not seem to be too much to suggest that we start acting as if we believed it.

Introduction

As late as 1910, one out of every three Americans lived on a family farm. Today the 11.5 million people living on the nation's farms represent less than 6 per cent of the population. In the last eight years 25 per cent of America's small farms have disappeared, but farm land has decreased only 4 per cent.

The current agricultural revolution is transforming the traditional American independent family farm into a faceless financial giant whose relationship to the soil is one of control and exploitation, and whose financial involvements with other industrial giants —often difficult to trace—form a network of fantastic proportions.

From time to time, the financial pages of the *New York Times* yield glimpses of American agriculture, 1960's - style. For several months during 1966, Hunt Foods, one of California's biggest "farmers," and probably best known for its tomato sauce, turned up in a fight for control of Crucible Steel. It got into the Illinois Appellate Court when dissident stockholders charged a conspiracy to turn control of Crucible over to a group headed by the finance committee chairman of Hunt Foods and Industries (who was also chairman of the Wheeling Steel board). Hunt Foods was reported to have an important stake in ABC, the McCall Corporation, and the Canada Dry Corporation, as well as in Wheeling and Crucible Steels. Comparing Hunt's 1965 and 1966 earnings during the quarters ending March 31, the figures were up from $3,538,000 to $4,439,000.

A similar kind of fight for control brought publicity early in 1967 to the Holly Sugar Corporation, second largest producer of beet sugar in the United States. The main contenders were Houston Oil Field Material Company, Inc. (Homco), which holds the largest number of Holly shares, and Western Nuclear, with which the Holly directors planned to merge.

It has also been reported that the Greyhound Corporation, " 'looking for a source' that can supply canned goods, frozen goods and the like to the company's $115 million food service operations," is discussing a tie-up with the giant food company of Libby, McNeil and Libby.

The Kern County Land Company of San Francisco, known for its successful evasion of the 160-acre limitation on use of federally financed irrigation water, reported its second quarter earnings as up 13 per cent over 1965. The six months' gross revenue was $86,315,000 compared with $76,593,000 the year before. According to the *Times* for June 6, 1966, "the diversified corporation is engaged primarily in oil and gas production, the manufacture of automotive parts and 'land use' including agriculture, cattle, and real estate."

Cattle, tomatoes, sugar, vegetables—American agriculture—controlling or controlled by oil, steel, real estate, communications—American industry. They are two sides of the same coin today, and any understanding of what has been happening to the small farmer and the farm worker must start with that knowledge.

Farm workers, through many years, have strived against great odds to achieve the dignity and decent living standards that other American workers have enjoyed. The relative wage position of hired farm workers is getting worse, even though their average hourly wage has risen. Farm workers have been denied most of the protections of social legislation secured by other workers, on the grounds that "agriculture is different." Although they suffer from unemployment more than most workers, their incomes have no protection under unemployment insurance. Although agriculture is the third most hazardous industry, workers often lack work-

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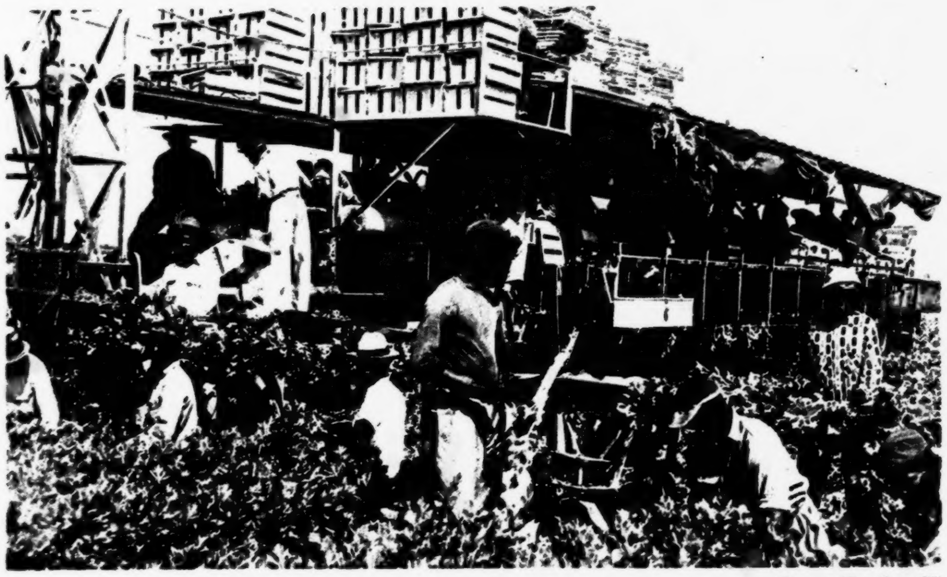
Hon. Harrison A. Williams, Jr.

U.S. Senator (New Jersey)
Chairman, Senate Subcommittee on
Migratory Labor

When the National Labor Relations Act was passed three decades ago, the American farm was primarily a family operation. Farming is now big business. My bill proposes to bring the big corporate farm and its employees under the collective bargaining provisions of the NLRA.

Under the bill, as introduced (S. 8, 90th Congress), only those farms whose interstate shipments amount to more than $50-thousand a year would be covered. This is only three per cent of the farms in the United States, but these farms employ more than 30 per cent of the farm labor.

In 1966 we took an historic first step toward rectifying the economic injustice which has plagued farm workers by enacting minimum wage coverage for them. Extending to them the same collective bargaining rights as are now enjoyed by workers in other industries will be the second major step toward economic justice for farm workers.



A factory in the field

Grant E. Averill

men's compensation. Children of farm workers are not protected to the same extent as other children under the Fair Labor Standards Act, and since incomes are so low, the whole family must work when it can, to help out. Above all, farm workers, when they organize to help themselves, are not protected in their right to bargain collectively with their employers, as are other industrial workers. They are subject to reprisal as well as refusal; to eviction, dismissal, and terror.

The myth has been carefully fostered that independent family farmers, themselves struggling for survival, would be hard hit or even bankrupt, by raising standards for farm workers. But small farmers are not the prime employers; rather, since their products compete in the market with the products of the corporate giants who hire most farm workers, their own incomes are driven down toward the level of the hired farm workers.

The top 9 per cent of all farms pay more than 70 per cent of the total annual farm wage bill. More than 30 per cent of all expenditures for hired farm labor is made by one-half of one per cent of the very largest farms.

The first federal minimum wage bill including agricultural workers, passed in 1966, covers fewer than 390,000 farm workers, most of whom are employed by the large "agribusiness" farms. Similarly, the proposed extension of the National Labor Relations Act to cover workers in agriculture would affect only 3 per cent of the farms—those whose shipments in interstate commerce amount to more than $50,000 a year.

It is time these great commercial establishments met the standards and responsibilities that their industrial counterparts—often in the same corporate structure—must meet.

American agriculture has changed. Public awareness has changed as well. The past two years have seen repeated evidence that this time the efforts of farm workers to organize and build a place for themselves in our national life will not fail.

This is a part of their story.

Farm Workers and The National Labor Relations Act

> The farm worker does not ask for charity or special privilege. All he seeks is that the national labor policy, applied to all other industry, be applied to him as well. All that he asks is that the machinery established by Congress, to resolve labor-management problems and settle any question of representation, be made available to him.
>
> But it is not available. So farm workers must seek bargaining rights through their own resources, with all the turmoil and disruption that is supposed to be a thing of the past.
>
> —George Meany, President, AFL-CIO[1]

In an age when there are labor unions for everyone from firemen to newspaper reporters, why should it be so difficult for farm workers to organize? The problem would be greatly eased if ten words—"shall not include any individual employed as an agricultural laborer"—were struck from one of the most powerful laws our nation has ever written. This revision would enable farm workers to join the millions of industrial workers who have the protection of the National Labor Relations Act guaranteeing their right to organize into unions and to bargain collectively.

What the National Labor Relations Act Does

The National Labor Relations Act states that an employer must sit down with, bargain with, and discuss grievances with elected representatives of his workers so that they can share in the decisions which crucially affect their lives. Administration of the law rests with the National Labor Relations Board, made up of five members appointed by the President of the United States.

The National Labor Relations Board conducts elections among workers of an employer to determine whether or not the majority wish to have a union represent them in their relationship with the employer. The National Labor Relations Act embodies this essential, democratic principle of the right to vote, the significance of which was eloquently put by Winston Churchill:

> At the bottom of all tributes paid to democracy is the little man, walking into the little booth, with a little pencil, making a little cross on a little bit of paper—no amount of rhetoric or voluminous discussion can possibly diminish the overwhelming importance of that point.[2]

In order to protect workers in their right to organize, the National Labor Relations Board is given the task of investigating charges of unfair labor practices of both employers and unions.

Employers are forbidden by law to interfere with workers' organizing efforts, to refuse to bargain in good faith, to discriminate against workers for union activity. They cannot, for example, organize a "company" union or show favoritism toward one union over another; they cannot fire, or refuse to hire, workers for reasons of union membership; they cannot refuse to deal with workers' representatives because the workers are out on strike.

For their part, labor unions are prohibited from engaging in such activities as coercion, secondary boycotts, refusing to bargain collectively in good faith, and charging excessive union initiation fees. Some specific examples of these unfair labor practices would be: picketing in such a way that nonstriking workers are physically barred from entering the plant; making threats that workers will lose jobs unless they support the union's activities.

The NLRB examines cases brought to it by individual workers, unions, and employers, and decisions are based upon field investigation and public hearings. Typical decisions may outlaw an employer-dominated union; require a union to refund dues improperly collected; require an employer to reinstate all workers laid off or fired as a result of union activity.[3]

Why Farm Labor Was Excluded From the NLRA

When the original bill was written in 1935 it included farm workers. According to Sam Zagoria, in 1967 a member of the National Labor Relations Board, "The father of the National Labor Relations Act, Senator Wagner, described his bill as based on the principle that 'democracy cannot work unless it is honored in the factory as well as the polling booth; and that men cannot be truly free in body and in spirit unless their freedom extends into the places where they earn their daily bread.' "[4]

But the bill was reported out of Committee two months later with farm workers specifically excluded. Adequate justification was never given. The Senate report stated "administrative reasons," and the House was equally vague. Representative Marcantonio fought against the exclusion in his minority report of the House Committee on Labor:

> I . . . respectfully submit that there is not a single solitary reason why agricultural workers should not be included under the provisions of this bill. [The same reasons urged for the adoption of this bill in behalf of industrial workers] are equally applicable in the case of agricultural workers, in fact more so as their plight calls for immediate and prompt action.[5]

But the bill's sponsor in the House, Representative Connery, chairman of the Labor Committee, opposed the inclusion of farm workers at that time:

> . . . The committee discussed this matter carefully in executive session and decided not to include agricultural workers. We hope that the agricultural workers will be taken care of. . . . I am in favor of giving agricultural workers every protection, but just now I believe in biting off one mouthful at a time. If we can get this bill through and get it working properly, there will be opportunity later, and I hope soon, to take care of the agricultural workers.[6]

It has been thirty-two years since Congress took its first bite, and farm labor has been neglected four times since when the Act has been amended.

What Exclusion From the NLRA Means To Farm Workers

As things stand now, growers can literally deny the existence of a farm labor union. It is common practice for them to return letters from union leaders unopened. Because a farm employer is not required by law to enter into this relationship, in order to bring him to the bargaining table farm workers are forced to strike, picket, and boycott. In essence, the struggle has been to try to establish grower recognition of a union representing the workers. Wages, hours, and working and living conditions are usually the issues which touch off a strike, but the real question has been whether the employer will sit down and negotiate with his workers.

Can a union even continue to exist if it is not acknowledged by the employer involved? The near-hundred-year history of farm labor unions attests to the fact that they cannot survive in a dynamic way unless some foothold is secured in the traditional collective bargaining process.

First Organizing Attempts in California

California's history of farm labor unions begins in the late 1880's when Chinese immigrants moved out to the rural areas and provided a cheap and abundant labor supply for the rapidly developing farm systems in the valleys. As a racial minority subject to intimidation from the white community, the Chinese were never in a position to form unions for purposes of collective bargaining, but they did develop what amounted to private employment agencies, which recruited and hired Chinese farm laborers. These protective associations, known as tongs, became the basis for the labor contractor system later utilized by other minority groups. The tongs, as described in 1888, "are very rarely heard of, but nevertheless exist and are very powerful. In case of a strike or boycott they are fierce and determined . . . making a bitter and prolonged fight."[1]

The Chinese were followed in succeeding years by Japanese, Hindustani, Filipinos, and Mexicans, for whom even low farm labor wages were an improvement over their former situation. Grower reliance upon this constantly replenished labor pool made it impossible for any durable labor unions to develop, for they were quickly submerged by immigrants who would work for less than the union demands. A pattern of racial conflict developed as each successive group jockeyed to become the growers' source of cheapest labor. (This tradition of flooding the bottom lasted, often with the cooperation of government, until 1964, when Congress called a halt to mass importation of Mexicans during the harvest seasons.)

The "Wobblies" Organize Farm Workers

Each group, like the Chinese, tried to organize separately and engage in strikes, but until the appearance in 1905 of the Industrial Workers of the World, known as the "Wobblies," no efforts were made to organize workers on a large scale. The Wobblies were formed by a merger of the Western Federation of Miners and the American Labor Union, groups of industrially organized workers who left the early, craft-controlled American Federation of Labor. The IWW was opposed to centralizing power at the top and wanted to organize the skilled and unskilled, urban and rural workers across the country into "One Big Union," with the aim of achieving eventual worker ownership of industries. Their strength lay in the rough frontier areas, where workers had no protection and law was the rule of the strongest.

During the days of the Klondike Gold Rush (beginning in 1896), thousands of men made their way up the Pacific coast hoping to find in Alaska their pot of gold. Not a few ran out of money on the way up and settled instead on the rich forest lands of the Pacific Northwest. It was here that the highly seasonal lumbering industry had its start, and gave rise to the wandering "bindle stiff," who worked sometimes in the lumber yards of the north, sometimes in the farmlands to the south, living during the off-seasons in the first "skid rows" of the urban industrial centers.

For several years the Wobblies worked with these bindle stiffs both in the cities where they holed up during the winter and in the rural areas where they sought employment. The Wobblies found they had to establish their freedom to speak before they could organize workers. In Fresno, California, they demanded the right to maintain headquarters, to hold public meetings, to distribute information. That struggle won, they went on to San Diego in 1912, where a local Vigilante Committee formed to meet them.[2]

This practice of vigilantism, where groups of citizens take what they consider to be the law into their own hands, is not foreign to California history. Carey McWilliams describes the Vigilance Committees of 1850 and 1856 (whose members were of the merchant and propertied classes) and says: "During the period when the vigilantes were in action, they completely usurped the functions of governmental officials, defied the Governor of the State, conducted their own trials, equipped and drilled an armed force, and operated in effect as an insurrectionary junta."[3]

Of the San Diego encounter Carey McWilliams wrote: " . . . The vigilantes rounded up all persons even remotely suspected of being wobblies and marched them, one night, to Sorrento. There the wobblies were made to . . . kiss the American flag and sing the national anthem, while hundreds of vigilantes stood about armed with revolvers, knives, clubs, black jacks, and black snake whips. Then they were marched to San Onofre and driven into a cattle pen and systematically slugged and beaten. After a time they were taken out of the pen and beaten with clubs and whips as, one at a time, they were made 'to run the gantlet.' "[4]

The Golden Years of American Agriculture

1910 to 1914 marked the period of agriculture's greatest prosperity.* But if these were successful years for farmers, the picture was considerably different for the workers. In August, 1913, the high point of Wobbly organizing, a situation developed which showed in frightening detail how farm workers were exploited while the growers reached unheard-of prosperity.

As was the practice of the day, E. B. Durst, a hop grower in Wheatland, California, had advertised in newspapers throughout California and Nevada for 2,700 workers, when in fact he required only 1,500 to harvest his crop. Twenty-eight hundred people came from all over the west. Half of them were aliens, and 7 interpreters were needed, for 27 nationalities were represented among 235 men in one working gang alone.

Destitute, the 1,000-odd extra workers could not move on, and conditions at the camp were intolerable: tents were rented from Durst at 75 cents a week; workers were forced to use his store as he forbade local grocers to make deliveries; there were 9 outdoor toilets for 2,800 people; drinking water was not allowed in the fields, since Durst's cousin had a lemonade concession there, at 5 cents a glass; a relative also owned the lunchtime "stew wagon."

Finally, at a mass meeting in the workers' camp, veteran Wobbly organizer Blackie Ford "dramatically held a sick baby up to the crowd and shouted 'It's for the kids we are doing this.'" Into the tense, emotion-filled crowd strode sheriff's deputies. One fired a shot to "quiet the mob." Immediately, a riot ensued, during the course of which a District Attorney, deputy sheriff, and two workers were killed. The National Guard was called out, and all over California Wobblies were arrested. Leading Wobbly organizers Ford and Suhr were convicted of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment.[5]

The Wheatland Riot brought the Wobblies nationwide attention, and after 1915 the most energetic group within the IWW was the Agricultural Workers Organization. The pre-World War I depression and the loss of urban jobs drove many workers to the Wheat Belt, and Wobbly organizing shifted to that region.

Departures were made from the basic strategy used in California. It was agreed not to spend union energies again on free speech fights, which had antagonized other elements of the farming communities. The change of tactic improved relations with growers and so made it easier to reach wage agreements. Also, "members were instructed never to hold out to the bitter end. In case of a strike, those directly involved were to bring other members of the union onto the struck job in order to strike again or to slow up production. . . ."[6]

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* During these years, called the parity years, farmers were considered to have gotten 100% of parity, or their fair share of the national income. Today when an abundance of certain crops considerably lowers the price and threatens the farm economy, the government can step in and buy up amounts of the product to make prices go back up. On specified crops, farmers are granted direct benefit or rental payments in return for reducing acreage. The objective is to keep farm income as near parity (i.e., the purchasing power of 1910-14) as possible.

Largely as a result of the new strategy in the Wheat Belt, by the end of 1916 the IWW's Agricultural Workers Organization "had enrolled nearly 20,000 workers, and its momentum was such that it was reported to have carried the total IWW membership from 5,000 in the spring of 1916 to over 70,000 at its peak in 1917."[7]

Since the Wobblies posed a threat to the existing economic system and to every power structure down to the local level, they were often met with repressive actions by police authorities (and occasionally by vigilantes, as we have seen). There were numerous mass arrests of strikers, usually with total disregard of civil liberties. The fact that the Wobblies grew steadily in the face of violence and intimidation indicates the strength of their appeal as well as the desperate condition of masses of workers during these years before the rise of American trade unionism.

It is difficult to say what would have happened to Wobbly organizing efforts if their opposition to World War I had not led to their prosecution by the federal government. During the war the Wobblies were charged with violation of the Espionage Act, and after the war they were prosecuted under state syndicalist laws passed during the war years. Wobbly activity returned sporadically during the twenties, but the IWW never made a successful comeback.[8]

The Depression Years

Farm labor organizing—and labor organizing in general—during the deepening depression years between 1929 and 1933 was virtually non-existent. Thousands of unemployed urban workers flooded the farm areas, and competition for jobs was bitter. In some areas wage levels of 50 cents an hour in 1929 had declined to 15 and 16 cents by 1933.[9] Though efforts at collective bargaining proved impossible during such labor surplus conditions, various factors contributing to labor unrest culminated in 1933 in a series of strikes unprecedented in number and size in farm labor history.

New Deal legislation passed in 1932 and 1933 helped urban workers and farm owners but had no effect upon farm workers. Although the Agricultural Adjustment Act (details of which are described in the chapter on the Southern Tenant Farmers Union) was designed to revitalize the agricultural economy, benefits were extended only to farmers and, theoretically, to sharecroppers. Similarly, the National Industrial Recovery Act helped urban workers but excluded farm workers from its provisions. The NIRA established maximum hours and minimum wages of $16 a week for industrial workers, and accorded them legal protection of their right to organize.

By mid-1933 the upheaval in the labor market was enormous. Organizing activities went apace, and farm workers were frustrated by their complete exclusion from the NIRA statutes which were bringing revolutionary changes to other industries.

The situation erupted in 1933 when a total of 56,800 farm workers went out on 61 different strikes in 17 states.[10] One organization backed by the Communist Party, the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union, capitalized on the explosive farm labor situation and led this spectacular wave of strikes.

October 4, 1933, marked the high point of CAWIU strike activity. Five thousand cotton pickers in Corcoran, California, struck for 90 cents per 100 pounds, protesting the prevailing wage rate of 60 cents. Refusing even to report for work, they boycotted the ranches altogether. When strikers attended a mass meeting at the Union Hall in Pixley, California, growers stationed themselves behind cars nearby, and opened fire on the hall. Two workers were killed during the ensuing violence.[11]

The union at first had instructed the workers to remain on the various ranches, but the growers evicted them. The strikers rented a nearby ranch for use as a headquarters. Passes were issued, guards patrolled the grounds. Two nurses were present to look after the strikers and to maintain adequate sanitary conditions. The value of having a central strike camp headquarters cannot be overestimated. Wrote Paul S. Taylor and Clark Kerr: "If the pickers had been able to follow the [union's] advice to remain scattered on the ranches the completeness of the strike might have been seriously impaired. Union leaders could hardly have reached them. . . . Arrangements of picket caravans and of mass meetings would have been more difficult. But . . . the growers insisted upon evictions. With no other place to go, the strikers gathered in camps erected or enormously expanded by the emergency. . . ."[12]

After modest mediation efforts the workers returned to pick cotton at a compromise wage of 75 cents per hundred pounds. The strike had lasted 24 days, during the course of which an estimated 18,000 workers had refused to report for work.

That the workers, many of whom were Mexican, had been, as usual, alone against the whole community in their struggle is borne out by the statement of an undersheriff:

> We protect our farmers here in Kern County. They are our best people. They are always with us. They keep the country

> going. They put us in here and they can put us out again, so we serve them. But the Mexicans are trash. They have no standard of living. We herd them like pigs.[13]

Twenty-five strikes waged in California in 1933 were spearheaded by CAWIU and involved 37,550 workers. Twenty-one of the strikes secured at least partial wage increases.[14]

CAWIU leaders were later arrested and tried on charges of criminal syndicalism. The union formally dissolved on March 17, 1935. CAWIU made few inroads toward collective bargaining agreements, for it was opposed to the negotiation tactics of the established unions. A major weakness was its lack of internal democracy and its dependence upon the leadership of a few individuals.

Filipino Agricultural Laborers Association: A Modern Union

There was one interesting instance of farm labor unionizing in the 1930's which arose directly from the workers themselves, rather than from an existing organization such as the Industrial Workers of the World or CAWIU. Those who are familiar with today's United Farm Workers Organizing Committee in Delano, California, may find similarities in the Filipino Agricultural Laborers Association. In many ways it is the first thoroughly modern farm labor union, and as such it is worth studying.

The Filipino Agricultural Laborers Association originated in 1939 among 6,000 Filipino asparagus pickers who walked off their

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Hon. *Jacob K. Javits*

U.S. Senator (New York)

We have just celebrated the occasion of the 25 millionth vote cast in secret ballot elections conducted by the National Labor Relations Board. That is, indeed, a notable achievement and justly deserved the recognition given to it. But the ceremony must have had somewhat of a hollow ring to the millions of agricultural employees to whom the orderly processes of the Board's procedures for settling organizational disputes have, until now, been denied.

One of the greatest achievements of the National Labor Relations Act has been the almost total elimination of organizational disputes as a source of strikes and lockouts. So long as agricultural employees are denied the same basic rights enjoyed by other employees under the law, the result, sooner or later, must be the same kind of bitter strife which preceded the Wagner Act—as witness the recent grape workers' strike in California.

Certainly the Congress should not wait until the labor-management struggle of the 1930's repeats itself on our farms before acting.

jobs in Stockton, California, in protest against a threatened wage cut. The union (later called the Federated Agricultural Laborers Association) was aided in its early days by the CIO and the AFL but it did not then affiliate. The membership worked closely with independent Mexican and Japanese unions, refusing to work as strikebreakers during their struggles. Late in 1940 it obtained a charter from the AFL.[15]

The union was composed almost entirely of Filipino farm workers around Stockton, Sacramento, and other central valley cities. It won several important strikes and gained union recognition, wage increases, improved conditions, and written contracts. According to Harry Schwartz, who made intensive studies of FALA, it saved thousands of dollars for its members by calling the authorities' attention to the practice of some farmers of deducting workmen's compensation payments from their employees' wages in defiance of statute. Schwartz summarized FALA's unusual features: "[It] has helped form the Philippine Mercantile Association, a cooperative enterprise at Stockton which sells groceries and Philippine Islands products. FALA members have been encouraged to buy shares of stock at $5.00 each. . . . The scope of the Mercantile Association can be judged by the fact that it reported a $40,000 sales total for its first year of business, and also by its recent opening of a branch store."[16]

Homogeneity of the membership was an important factor in the union's success. The workers had a common cultural past, they worked under similar conditions, and faced the same problems. The union's goals, like those of UFWOC at present, were not limited to wage increases and recognition by growers; their activities encompassed the farm workers' way of life.

U.S. involvement in World War II siphoned farm workers off to the cities, and growers turned increasingly to Mexican laborers for harvest work. The Federated Agricultural Laborers Association could not withstand the competition of a cheap labor supply and it soon collapsed.

* * *

The effects of World War II on agricultural labor are described in a later chapter. After the war farm workers entered a new phase of their struggles. The American Federation of Labor assumed the lead in bringing attention to bear on the farm labor situation. The successor to the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, whose early history follows, was later given the first national AFL charter to organize farm workers.

The Southern Tenant Farmers Union

Henry Clay East was running a filling station in the early 1930's in the small cotton belt town of Tyronza, Arkansas; he was also the constable. His friend Harry Leland Mitchell owned the dry cleaners next door. Both men were acutely aware of the grinding poverty of the tenant farmers, Negro and white, who worked on the area's huge cotton plantations.*

Eastern Arkansas in the Thirties

The plantation system was a recent development in eastern Arkansas, for the land could not be cultivated until flood control levees were built in the early 1900's. Few of the system's paternalistic traditions existed here since the plantations were larger and more commercialized than in the older cotton areas, and many planters were absentee owners; supervision was left to the "riding boss," a "khaki-clad, gun belted, booted figure of authority,"[1] who in many ways took over the old role of the slave overseer. For their part, the sharecroppers had often migrated to the area from other states during the twenties, and the whites, at least, hadn't had to learn the outward submission and passivity necessitated in the old South by generations of slavery. Thus conditions of unrest in this area lay closer to the surface than in any other part of the South.

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* Tenant farming arose in the aftermath of the Civil War and in many ways was a continuation of the plantation slavery which the war had supposedly ended. The newly freed Negroes owned no land or farm implements; the planters still had both, and needed labor. Instead of cash wages, the worker received a set share of the crop at year's end. The myriad categories of tenants gradually narrowed: the "sharecropper" turned over half of his crop to the planter, who had "furnished" seed, fertilizer, mule team, implements, food staples, and a shack to live in on his land. A share renter was one who had his own farming tools and supplies, and in return for land and a cabin he paid the planter a stipulated share of the crop as rent. As cotton prices fell toward the end of the nineteenth century, numerous small farmers lost their land, and thus many whites joined Negroes in competing for the available tenancies.

When the depression hit, not only did cotton prices plunge, but rural people who had gone to the cities were forced back to the cotton country, where opportunities were fewer than ever. The sawmills of eastern Arkansas shut down, greatly increasing the numbers of unemployed, and sceptical reporters returned from the area horror-struck by the poverty, disease, and desperation of the people. A single story was typical of thousands:

> " . . . One woman, her name was Ollie Strong, she died begging for a cup of coffee. She was the mother of eleven children. . . . I have seen her hack crossties and haul them fifteen and twenty miles to sell them so she could get herself and the children something to eat. . . . She chopped cotton on various plantations when she was with child. . . . She went to picking when she was swelled so large she couldn't stoop over. She would have to crawl on her knees so as to be able to pick. . . . When she died there wasn't anything to eat at all in the one-room pole cabin. The last thing she called for was a cup of coffee, but there wasn't any."[2]

If a tenant was "shiftless," "troublesome," or simply was no longer wanted by the landlord for any reason, he was unceremoniously evicted; the "riding boss" knew his place would be filled immediately. One landlord, "to enforce eviction, tried in midwinter to pull the doors and shutters off a cabin in which the cropper's wife and children huddled in thin cotton clothes. The cropper tried to resist; the landlord shot him."[3]

In the summer of 1933 the situation worsened. There was a huge U.S. cotton surplus and another bumper crop was expected. The Agricultural Adjustment Act, passed in the same year, required that some cotton land be plowed under to create scarcity and raise prices. In eastern Arkansas, the poverty became more acute than in other cotton-producing areas, for the growing mechanization of agriculture combined with the effects of the new AAA program left proportionately more sharecroppers without homes or work.[4]

Few tenants could understand the sense of "plow under." Clay East told of his reaction when a government official asked him what he thought of the program: "That was it, I really blew up, I ask him if I looked like a plum damn idiot, I told [him] that all of my life I had been taught not to destroy anything that might be useful to someone or something else, I was taught to never throw an apple core or bread crust in the fire, and now he was asking me if I approved of people in rags with no sheets in the house plowing under cotton." Historian Donald Grubbs adds: "As they had been trained to do, mules avoided stepping on the cotton they were made to plow up. 'Mules have more sense than men,' said the tenants."[5]

Under AAA, the government compensated for the financial loss by sending benefit payments to the planters who signed yearly cotton acreage reduction contracts. Benefits were to be shared by tenant and landlord according to their interest in the crop (50-50 in the case of sharecroppers, and varying proportions for other tenants depending on their rental arrangements). But since the landlord signed the contract and the money was sent to him to distribute, few tenants ever received their share. It was of little use to complain to the Agriculture Department; the planters and their friends composed the local committee which would "investigate." According to the new contract terms established a year later, sharecroppers received only one-ninth of the government benefits instead of one-half, and other classes of tenants fared little better. As a result of the cotton contract, one representative planter's "gross income *increased* . . . from $51,554 in 1932 to $102,202 in 1934 while the average gross income of his tenants *fell* from $379 to $355."[6]

The Beginnings of STFU

It was against this background of government policy that actually increased poverty, rather than alleviating it, that H. L. Mitchell and his friend Clay East became committed to improving the lot of the sharecroppers. Both men had heard Norman Thomas speak in Memphis during the 1932 political campaign. They secured Thomas's support for a study of the Agricultural Adjustment Act, which was enriching Southern planters while bringing new misery to the workers. It was during a conversation with Thomas that the idea for the Southern Tenant Farmers Union was conceived, and Norman Thomas was always considered its godfather although the Union never affiliated with any political party.

While there was no leadership yet visible among the sharecroppers, Mitchell and East were aware that the structure of the Union nonetheless had to develop from within. They approached an outspoken white sharecropper, Alvin Nunnally, who called the first meeting early in July, 1934. Close to twenty sharecroppers, Negro and white, came to an abandoned schoolhouse on a cotton plantation owned by Hiram Norcross, near Tyronza. (A popular sharecropper song of the day ran thus: "You go to the fields and work all day / 'Til after dark, and you get no pay / Just a little piece of meat and a little turn of corn / It's hell to be a sharecropper on the Norcross farm."[7])

From the outset it was to be a racially mixed union: the problems of Negro and white sharecroppers were essentially the same, though in some areas it was necessary initially to organize separate Negro and white locals. Looking back on that first meeting, H. L. Mitchell said, "I remember one old white man who got up and said that he'd once been a member of the Ku Klux Klan . . . but that everybody was in the same boat in this fight here. Negroes were on the plantations . . . and the union should include both white and colored and fight for the rights of everyone."[8] There was also an inherent danger in having a completely Negro union; in 1919, more than 100 Negroes who had formed one in a nearby county were killed in the "Elaine Massacre." Negroes in the Delta had heard of the Massacre and one at the first meeting had been there and narrowly escaped; the decision to join the new union therefore took great personal courage.

On July 26, 1934, the organization was incorporated under the laws of the state of Arkansas and shortly after took Southern Tenant Farmers Union as its name. Its objectives were the relief of displaced workers; collective bargaining agreements between workers and landlords; and revamping of the Agricultural Adjustment Act.[9] Mitchell and East wanted to remain in the background, but no one else was yet able to run the organization. East became the first president, and his position as constable was a powerful force in countering the croppers' fear of joining the union and in stemming the planters' hostilities while the little group was building its strength. Mitchell's business had given him invaluable knowledge of the residents and geography of the area, and his organizational ability made him the obvious choice for secretary, a post he held for the life of the union.

There was some confusion, in the beginning, about just what unionism was. One early member commented: "When they first started talking about union, I thought it was a new church."[10] (Union meetings did have elements reminiscent of church services, since for many members the church was the only organization they had ever had contact with.) But one thing was clear: it was open to everyone, even those who couldn't afford to pay the $1.00 dues.

The Negro members, who had grown up within the rigid society of the cotton country, were often more literate than the white sharecroppers, who were new to the plantation system, having been "isolated so far back in the mountains that 'you had to pump daylight in to them.' "[11] The Negroes were also more aware of the value of cooperation with each other and thus were easier to organize than the whites, whose fierce individualism often made them less desirable as tenants, in the planters' view.

From the earliest days, education was a major concern. In addition to calling for improvement of the utterly inadequate rural schools for their children, STFU members eagerly participated in adult education courses organized by the Union; occasionally members were able to attend sessions at labor schools, where they could gain new understanding of their role in the struggles of the American labor movement. The idea of cooperatives was also championed by STFU; consumer buying clubs were formed, and an STFU cooperative farm ran successfully for many years.

One of the common bonds, shared by all members, was the necessity for secrecy. An STFU memorandum on the subject stated the procedures of a union meeting: "The Unit Leader—calls the meeting to order. Prayer service may be held—as silently as possible. . . . A Union song may be sung—this should be avoided if it attracts attention to your meeting. . . . Go [home] one or two at a time in different directions. Avoid the highways and roads as much as possible—keep away from lights of automobiles. . . ."[12] Organizers were told to keep their efforts under cover, to concentrate on building a small nucleus of reliable members. Mitchell counseled:

> "Never promise the workers that the Union is going to do something for them. Let them join the Union and do something themselves."[13]

By the end of 1934 a situation developed which threw the Southern Tenant Farmers Union into the public spotlight for the first time. Many sharecroppers and tenants received notice from their landlords to move elsewhere. The decrease in cotton acreage had proportionately decreased the need for workers. Moreover, the landlords wanted to become the sole beneficiaries of the government's largess, and the cotton contract terms actually encouraged planters to shift from keeping tenants to hiring wage labor—the

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H. L. Mitchell

Co-founder, STFU;
International Representative,
Amalgamated Meat Cutters and
Butcher Workmen, AFL-CIO

In the beginning (when the Southern Tenant Farmers Union was first organized) we never received any actual support from organized labor. The local labor people in Memphis said . . . that no one could organize a union among people as poor as the sharecroppers.

It depends on what one's approach to the labor movement is. If organized labor is just a business operation, then the attitude of the trade union leaders toward agricultural workers is correct, because it will take a lot of money to organize and establish a strong union and the returns on the investment made will be slow in coming.

If the leadership (of organized labor) really wanted to organize the unorganized, it could be done. It would also help if we could bring agricultural workers under the National Labor Relations Act.

All it would take to organize the farm workers on the nation's larger farm enterprises would be determination by organized labor to get the job done. Organized labor has the money. Manpower is available.

benefits did not have to be shared with hired workers. The planters were able to profit immensely by the tenants' powerlessness and their ignorance of the complicated provisions of the cotton contract. Tenants demanding their rights were evicted and could easily be replaced, if needed, with workers who thronged the roads; homeless and desperate to feed their families, they would sign over their benefit rights in order to find a place. The displacement resulting from outright evictions was compounded by an old tenant custom: as the year-end approached, many would seek a better farming arrangement on another plantation. But unaware of the extent of the upheaval around them, thousands took to the roads only to find no "places" to be had, and their old ones taken when they tried to return. Said one bewildered cropper, "There was plenty of work, and what I don't understand is why it ain't that way now, 'cause the land is still here."[14]

The issue came to a head in January, 1935, when it was learned that only Southern Tenant Farmers Union members were being evicted from the huge Norcross plantation. STFU leaders decided to file for a court decision on the question of whether tenants were protected by Section 7 of the cotton contract, which was clearly intended to prevent their displacement as a result of the cotton reduction program. Although the suit was eventually lost, the issue had been brought into public debate. Eviction of sharecroppers on grounds of union membership scared the AAA; even its supporters saw that it would lay the program open to strong criticism. The AAA thereupon decided to send an impartial observer to investigate sharecropper conditions. Mary Connor Myers, a brilliant Boston lawyer, was dispatched to Arkansas, where she interviewed hundreds of sharecroppers on dozens of plantations.

She soon sent a telegram to the AAA: "HAVE HEARD ONE LONG STORY HUMAN GREED . . . SECTION SEVEN ONLY ONE [OF] SECTION[S OF] CONTRACT BEING OPENLY AND GENERALLY VIOLATED. . . . CROPPERS . . . ALL PATHETICALLY PLEASED GOVERNMENT HAS SENT SOMEONE TO LISTEN TO THEM. . . ." A newspaper editorialized, "If she finds the fire, Secretary Wallace will put it out." Full disclosures were expected; the sharecroppers were confident. As the weeks went by with no word on the report, " . . . an avalanche of letters descended upon AAA and the Department of Agriculture, the first time any effort related to the STFU ever called forth a nationwide response."[15] But the report was never made public, never acted upon.

In March of 1935 began a reign of terror as STFU stepped up its organizing activities: "Meetings were banned and broken up; members were falsely accused, arrested and jailed; convicted on trumped up charges and thrown into prison; relief was shut off; Union members were evicted from the land by the hundreds;

Cotton chopping in the Delta

U.S.D.A. Photograph

homes were riddled with bullets from machine guns; churches were burned, and schoolhouses were stuffed with hay and the floors removed; highways were patrolled night and day by armed vigilantes looking for the leaders; organizers were beaten, mobbed and murdered and the entire country was terrorized."[16]

Planters, with the aid of postal employees, conducted mail-opening campaigns to discover which tenants were union members. Many of STFU's leaders and members had to flee for their lives across the river to Memphis. When the terrorism died down a few months later, however, the union's organizational structure was still intact, and it had gained vital outside support through the nationwide publicity resulting from the brutality and lawlessness.

The Cotton Strikes

In the fall of 1935 an estimated 4,000 cotton pickers responded to STFU's call and walked off the fields for ten days just as the cotton was ripe, in an effort to raise their wages; ". . . thousands suddenly were confined in bed with the 'mis'ry' or found it necessary to go fishing to replenish the family larder."[17]

Planters revived their mail-opening campaigns, and relief authorities near the strike area severed payments to some 4,500 recipients,[18] thus forcing them into the cotton fields.*

H. L. Mitchell described the strategy behind STFU's first strike: "Our system, used for the first time, was to have handbills printed and the delegates would take back several hundred copies of this handbill and then on a specified night, these handbills were distributed all over the plantations at the same time. The handbills were put on fence posts and telephone poles, barn doors, everywhere—saying that a strike was on and to stay out of the fields. It was the most effective demonstration that could be imagined. In three counties where we had just a few members, practically all work stopped. . . . The result of the strike was that the planters raised wages to 75¢ per 100 pounds, and in some places to $1. There weren't any negotiations. There never have been."[19]

The success of the strike strengthened the union. H. L. Mitchell

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*A variation of this traditional tactic is still effective: a headline in the March 3, 1962, *Arkansas Gazette* read: "County Judge Slashes Surplus Food List to Provide Local Labor for Cotton Harvest," and the practice has been widely used in the 1960's in the neighboring Delta counties of Mississippi.

wrote on September 31, 1935: "Over thirty new locals have been organized within the past 45 days, and many more will be during this month. Two were reported today."[20]

Early in 1936 evictions of STFU members rapidly increased, and a new wave of violence began. A dynamite stick was thrown into a tent colony which had been set up for some of the evictees; a witness to a brutal breaking up of a union meeting was murdered. As usual, local law officers joined and even led planters and riding bosses in the terrorism, and a second Elaine Massacre was feared. In spite of both state and federal indifference, however, the violence finally subsided.

A second STFU strike was launched in May of 1936, this time at the height of the cotton chopping season. (In the spring rains, weeds thrive along with the young cotton plants and must be destroyed or they will choke the crop.) With increased membership, the strike strategy expanded somewhat. Said Mitchell: " . . . White farmers who owned their tiny farms but who, during the cotton chopping and picking seasons went to the plantations to work for wages . . . took the lead in the strike. They organized . . . the 'Marches' . . . with each man about 6 or 8 feet apart, forming a long thin picket line. . . . They began with possibly a hundred men, to start the day's march of 25 or 30 miles through the plantations. And when they came to a plantation where people were out in the cotton fields, the marchers would call out to the people at work. . . . There was no violence—just people lined up, walking down the roads singing and calling on others to join them."[21]

The governor sent in 25 National Guardsmen, who set up machine guns at key crossroads. One of them was trained on two Negroes who were "a little impudent." Terrorism raged for two weeks after the strike began.[22] In spite of numerous official investigations all through these years (often inspired by brutal incidents of violence that made headlines all across the country), no effective federal or state action was ever taken for political reasons.

The strike ended in failure, partly because the planters were forewarned of the elaborate plans that had been laid two months in advance. But the real reasons lay deep within the rigid structure of the plantation system. The sharecroppers were pitted against large landowners who controlled nearly every aspect of their lives. Under conditions little different from today, not only did the sharecroppers live in the planter's shacks, they were often in arrears at his store; his influence over local law enforcement was considerable. (It was not unusual to find long-time resident sharecroppers working off sentences of "vagrancy" on privately-owned "prison farms.") The landowners also had close relationships with each other as a result of marriage and family ties, longstanding friendships, and similar economic interests. A few planters initially unopposed to the union were soon "persuaded" to the position of the majority. It was nearly impossible for striking sharecroppers to find a crack in this solid front of the opposition.

But while the STFU failed to halt the disastrous effects of AAA, it nevertheless had a far-reaching impact. Wisconsin Senator Robert LaFollette, Jr., attended a fund-raising dinner for STFU in 1935. One of the guests was a sharecropper—beaten, bandaged—who had recently been attacked by planters' henchmen for his membership in STFU. LaFollette was deeply shocked, and in the spring of 1936 he headed a Senate committee which launched the most extensive investigation of the violations of free speech and the rights of labor in American history. It led to an exposé of the illegal methods used to destroy unions in spite of their rights guaranteed under the National Labor Relations Act. Ironically, while farm workers had been excluded from coverage under the NLRA, passed in 1935, their struggles helped other workers who were covered. John L. Lewis stated that organization of the giant CIO industrial unions would not have been possible without the spotlight thrown by the LaFollette Committee on management-financed terrorism.[23] According to one authority, "The LaFollette Civil Liberties Committee derived directly out of the STFU."[24]

Transition

Lacking a financially secure membership, the Southern Tenant Farmers Union had been dependent upon many organizations—including the Workers Defense League, the League for Industrial Democracy, the American Civil Liberties Union, and church groups—for publicity and legal and financial aid. Mitchell commented: "If it had not been for outside support . . . we would never have been able to continue."[25]

In March of 1937, the first National Sharecroppers Week was held under the joint sponsorship of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union and the Workers Defense League, with the purpose of making the country aware of sharecroppers' conditions and raising funds for the union. (In 1943 an organization was formed to expand fund raising activities, and for the next sixteen years the National Sharecroppers Fund contributed three-quarters of its annual income to the support of STFU and its successors and helped to publicize their struggle. NSF still continues its work among low-income rural people in the South.)

During the early summer of 1937 the Southern Tenant Farmers Union and other unions with similar interests decided to unite into one national union. H. L. Mitchell shared in the formation of the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of

America, and in July of that year the new union received a charter from the Congress of Industrial Organizations.

STFU affiliation with UCAPAWA was brief. Mitchell had joined the national effort with the assumption that his union would retain its autonomy, but this was not to be the case. The president of UCAPAWA wanted a highly centralized federation with STFU dues going into the international treasury. A year later 112 of 178 STFU locals voted to withdraw from UCAPAWA, which was later expelled by the CIO as a communist-controlled union.

The work of the STFU, again independent, went on. In southeastern Missouri in 1939, planters carried out a mass eviction of 1,500 sharecroppers; they were told they could become wage hands or get out. Negroes and whites camped out in a snowstorm along Highway 60 and Highway 61 for more than a week. The public was aroused, and labor unions rallied to prod government officials into providing relief aid to the evictees. Mitchell enlisted the support of Mrs. Roosevelt, and the Missouri National Guard was instructed to send tents and blankets. The relief didn't have time to arrive. The planters retreated, broke up the demonstration, and let the workers return to their shacks.

The Missouri demonstration is a fitting conclusion to STFU's early history. The Union remained active during the war years, but it is not until 1946 that the sequel begins. STFU's successor affiliated with the American Federation of Labor; its story is in a later chapter. It was years before the work of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union could be evaluated. For a while, even Mitchell saw only STFU's failure to gain collective bargaining agreements and not the Union's salutory effect upon the machinery of government and upon public opinion. In 1941 he unhappily assessed STFU: "Though a few hundred members regularly pay dues, the Southern Tenant Farmers Union does not constitute a trade-union. There is no basis for trade-unionism in southern agriculture with conditions such as prevail."[26]

Only later, when developments within the government finally demonstrated official concern for the sharecroppers, could Mitchell make a more accurate appraisal of the union's achievements: "The formation of the President's Farm Tenancy Commission was, let us say, due in part to the organization of the union of sharecroppers. If there had not been an organization of sharecroppers making a noise, Roosevelt would never have established a farm security administration or done anything about the problems of farm tenancy."[27]

Hawaii and Its "Little NLRA"

Hawaii is the only state in which all workers in large-scale agriculture are organized, and have been for twenty years. They have an adequate minimum wage law; they have comprehensive medical plans; they are given paid holidays and vacations; they receive sick pay and severance pay; they are entitled to workmen's compensation; they are covered under the state's collective bargaining law.

Hawaii's success story did not come about easily. Union organizers, in fact, faced formidable, monolithic opposition from sugar plantation owners. Even as late as 1946 (the year in which most plantations were successfully organized in Hawaii), the situation was this: "Through a system of interlocking marriages and directorates, the five companies—Castle & Cooke, Alexander & Baldwin, American Factors, C. Brewer & Company, and Theo. H. Davies & Company—own Hawaii. Their officers and directors control 96% of the sugar plantations, three irrigation companies, three banks, five public utilities, four pineapple companies, two steamship companies, two newspapers, two insurance companies, and at least seventeen other miscellaneous concerns."[1]

Strikes by Racial Groups Unsuccessful

The first recorded strike in Hawaii occurred in 1841 when Hawaiian workers walked off the fields of Koloa plantation on Kauai for eight days demanding 25 cents a day, or about 2 cents an hour. The workers lost.[2]

Hawaiian planters had used the principle of "divide and rule" for generations. Over the years workers were imported from China, Portugal, the South Sea islands, Japan, Norway, Puerto Rico, Korea, Spain, Russia, and the Philippines. Each group was intentionally brought in to prevent any other from feeling secure enough to strike, or to demand collective bargaining rights.[3] This statement appeared in the official planters' publication, *The Planters Monthly*, in 1883: "By employing different nationalities, there is less danger of collusion . . . among laborers, and the employer, on the whole, obtains better discipline."[4]

It took years for the workers to understand the importance of inter-racial unity; "the 'pre-history' of successful unionism here is replete with tragic tales of labor organizations, wage movements, strikes, and hopes shattered on the twin rocks of racial exclusiveness and racial strikebreaking."[5]

A strike of Japanese workers on Oahu in 1909 failed, not for lack of organizational structure, but because it was run along racial lines. The reaction of the planters' association was to hire strikebreakers of other nationalities, and pay them 117 per cent more than the strikers had received. Although a Higher Wages Association was formed in response to news articles about racial discrimination, the strike failed after 13 weeks.

Both the Japanese and the Filipinos, although they had separate labor organizations, nevertheless suffered the same abuses, looked for the same remedies. The Japanese went on strike again in 1920. Evicted from plantation property, they camped in Honolulu parks, where hundreds died of epidemic influenza. In 1924, 1,600 Filipinos struck for eight months, involving 23 of the 45 plantations. During the course of the strike, 16 strikers and 4 policemen were killed. With a brutality rare in Hawaii, the National Guard produced machine guns and tear gas. Sixty strike leaders were jailed for four years; thus deprived of its leadership, the strike effort failed.

The last strike attempt along racial lines was by Filipinos on Maui in 1937; the strike was launched by the Filipino labor organization called the "Vibora Luviminda." Efforts were successful in stopping the harvesting but the Filipinos could not convince other groups to strike in other areas of the crop's production. It became clear that the success of the strike, though limited, was attributable to financial support from the Japanese and the CIO unions. The Vibora Luviminda died an anachronism; henceforth serious organizing efforts would not be limited to racial unions.

Sometimes, when demands were specific and did not dangerously affect the whole system, the workers won minor victories. In May of 1904, 1,600 men walked off a plantation at Waipahu in a ten-point protest against their overseer. He was fired and the men went back to work.

Within the confining limits of paternalism, the planters had some sense of responsibility for their workers; the plantation system was completely dependent upon institutionalized inequality, but brutality was rare on the personal level. "That the planters were benevolent is undeniable. Their record . . . is the more remarkable if the policies of large agricultural employers in California at the time are taken as the standard of comparison."[6]

But the price exacted for even such comparative benevolence was an unswerving loyalty on the part of the workers to the plantation system. "Labor organization was an anomaly. To join a labor union constituted a breach of faith, an act of treason of the highest order, sapping the foundations of a whole social order."[7] Yet conditions remained so deplorable that efforts to organize recurred.

The plantations consistently rejected worker-ownership of homes, a more modern means of improving and stabilizing the work force. On the contrary, the old perquisite system, analogous to "furnish" in the Southern states, was expanded because it allowed the planter nearly complete control over his workers.

The system worked smoothly, with few disruptions, for a generation or so. Because agricultural work went on without respite throughout the year, many more children went to school than was common among children of farm workers—often migrants—on the mainland. One man recalled his student days in Hawaii: "The public school system perhaps without realizing it created unrest and disorganization. Here the children learn about democracy or at least the theory of it. . . . We also learned a bit of self-respect. We didn't have to kiss any man's feet."[8]

Education, by the thirties, had done much to break down the racial barriers of language and culture. A more stable labor supply had evolved by this time, too; native Hawaiian workers—second and third generation descendants of immigrants—had increased from 12 per cent to 45 per cent of the total.[9]

Hawaii's Waterfront Is Organized

The general strike in San Francisco in 1934 was to signal the turning point in Hawaii's organizing history. Most of Hawaii's exports landed in San Francisco, where the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union was successfully organizing the dockworkers who loaded and unloaded shipments. While San Francisco dockworkers were struggling to obtain contracts, dockworkers in Hawaii risked nothing and registered few demands. The upshot was that "Lack of unionization at one end of its operations posed a threat to the survival of unions at the other end."[10]

Attempts were therefore made to organize Hawaii's waterfront. In order to counter the ILWU efforts, one of the leading companies, Castle & Cooke, began to improve working conditions. They in effect tried to satisfy union demands before they reached the bargaining table in order to make unionism seem unnecessary (an illegal tactic under the National Labor Relations Act). To this end they opened a recreation hall, increased wages, and provided assistance for employees who were sick or disabled. In 1937 the National Labor Relations Board found Castle & Cooke guilty of violating the rights of workers. Finally, after 10 months of striking, Honolulu longshoremen won contracts in May, 1941.

World War II

But World War II put an end to organizing for a while, although the effects of the war economy were to be contributing factors in the subsequent union organizing in Hawaii. The Islands underwent a period of martial law that lasted from Pearl Harbor to mid-1944. Hawaii was divided into a military sector, where wages were high, and a civilian sector (including the plantations and their workers), where wages were frozen at the prewar level. Although the cane and pineapple workers could not benefit from the prosperity, they nevertheless were exposed to the possibility of a social mobility heretofore unknown in Hawaii. New roads freed workers from their isolated plantation outposts; the free spending of the troops increased the workers' dissatisfaction with their lot.

One unhappy result of the war was the distrust shown the older Japanese workers, whose ties to Japan were felt to be still very strong. The elements of the Islands' power structure—administration, press, clergy, labor—therefore looked to the younger Japanese for articulation of their peoples' needs, since they had been born in the Islands and were considered loyal Americans. The young spokesmen for the Japanese segment of Hawaii's population were modern and educated, eager for unionism.

Plantation Workers Organize

If the workers themselves were ready to organize, the members of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union were equally eager to recruit them. After the war, "Upon the removal of military controls, plantation workers embraced unionism virtually overnight, sometimes organizing on their own before the organizers dispatched from Honolulu could arrive. With unfilled jobs of all kinds everywhere apparent, joining a union became, for the first time . . . riskless in terms of immediate opportunities."[11]

The ILWU had organized Hawaii's waterfront before the war, but the union's success depended upon expansion. In order to effectively control the docks the ILWU also had to control production at its source—the plantations. It was generally thought that progress would be made only if Hawaiian workers organized along the same lines as their employers, covering all plantations, mills, and ports from which the "Big Five" drew revenue. Since the dockworkers and sugar workers had the same employers, it was only logical that they find strength in the same union, the ILWU. Curtis Aller comments on the ramifications of the Hawaiian labor situation: "Given this concentration of economic power on the one side and the parallel concentration of union power on the other, the quality of labor relations attains a unique importance. Conflict between these two giants acquires some of the overtones of a civil war as both commit their full resources to battle once it occurs."[12]

The ILWU had firmly established itself as wielding a power which nearly equaled that held by a few plantation families for generations. Largely as a result of the ILWU's efforts, in May, 1945, the Hawaii Employment Relations Act was passed, which won collective bargaining rights for agriculture. Even with this legal guarantee the battle might have been a costly one, were it not for the combination of a limited labor supply and the realism of the growers. Aller makes these two points very well: "The plantations' historical policy of maintaining a surplus labor pool had been destroyed. No longer able to replace workers the plantations were loath to take retaliatory action against union members."[13] Further, "Union officials have stated, and the record supports them, that the sugar companies made surprisingly little effort to interfere with the organization of workers. . . . The Hawaiian Pineapple Company, the largest pineapple producer, formally instructed its foremen by written memorandum that there was to be no interference with the efforts of their employees to organize and to join trade unions."[14]

Hawaii had met the necessary conditions for successful unionism which David E. Thompson describes: "The objective of trade union organization is to create a situation in which the organized workers can effectively deny labor to an employer who will not meet their terms for the sale of labor. Fundamentally, the power to bargain for improved wages and conditions depends upon the extent to which such a situation is created."[15]

By the end of 1946 Hawaiian industry was almost wholly unionized: sugar and pineapple plantations, docks and utilities were organized. The sweeping union movement had wrought revolutionary change in the community's power structure. Out of the system which had concentrated economic power in five companies had come countervailing power—the unity of the workers.

The AFL, the CIO, and Farm Workers After World War II

As early as 1889 the American Federation of Labor discussed the organization of agricultural trade unions. Its initial successes were in the field of livestock production rather than crop production, and its first charter was issued near the end of the 19th century to cow punchers on a huge ranch in west Texas. By 1902 it had placed organizers in the field. In 1910 the national convention of the AFL instructed its executive council to bring farm workers within the province of unionism.

The first stable union of agricultural workers, still in existence today, was organized among sheep shearers in 1895 and brought within the American Federation of Labor in 1912. Isolated from the major sources of labor, the sheep ranchers of the Pacific Coast and Rocky Mountain regions were dependent upon the unique skills of a small group of itinerant shearers; since the sheep wool must be clipped at certain times of the year, the bargaining power of these workers was greatly enhanced. In 1938 the Sheep Shearers Union of the AFL was absorbed into the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America, AFL.

Organized labor's support of farm worker unionization did not result in major efforts until after World War II. U.S. involvement in that war had a profound effect on the agricultural sector of the economy. Thousands of farm workers migrated to the cities, where they found jobs in the expanding defense industries. The drain on the agricultural labor supply was so extensive that in 1942 the U.S. government contracted with the Mexican government for workers.

Importation of Mexican Workers

The story of the disastrous effects of the massive importation of Mexican workers is a long and depressing one and can only be briefly outlined here.[1] At first, the government itself was the prime contractor and sublet its contracts to farm employers, but in 1948 the system changed to that of individual contracts between workers and employers negotiated by the two governments. In 1951, under the pressure of Korean war labor shortages, Congress enacted Public Law 78, which governed the importation of Mexican workers. P.L. 78 was a "temporary" measure, but grower interests succeeded in having Congress extend it time after time, with only minor revisions, until finally further extension was defeated and the program had to terminate at the end of 1964.

Before growers' requests for foreign workers could be approved, P.L. 78 had required the Secretary of Labor to certify that domestic workers were not available in sufficient numbers at the time and place needed, and that the existing wages and working conditions of American workers would not be adversely affected by permitting the use of the Mexican workers requested. But during the fifties a pattern arose which evaded the original intent of the law. Growers would offer such low wages that few domestics would apply for work. Having created an artificial domestic labor shortage, growers were then able to request and receive Mexican braceros. In the absence of a free labor market, wage scales in some bracero-dominated crops remained frozen for years, and in some cases even dropped, while wages in other industries were rising. One worker testified in 1962 about the California cherry harvest: "I remember in 1948, when they didn't have any braceros, we got $1.10 a bucket. Then . . . after they ran the [Mexican] Nationals in, the price went down to 85¢ a bucket and even lower. Just the last couple of seasons, it finally got back up to where it was 14 years ago: $1.10 a bucket. And the only reason it did was because the union put the heat on the government and made them take out the Nationals."[2]

Many farm workers during this period turned to other kinds of work, and some simply found themselves with no jobs at all as the only work they knew was taken from them by the growing numbers of braceros. There was little attempt by the government to enforce the provision that domestic workers must be given preference for jobs, and growers preferred the docile labor force of braceros, whose abject poverty drove them to work long, hard hours for meagre wages that were nevertheless sizeable sums for their families back home in Mexico.

The U.S. Department of Labor, which administered the importation program, came under mounting public pressure to defend domestic workers against the evils of P.L. 78. While opponents of the law failed to bring about its termination until 1964, they were partially successful in pressing for implementation of the law's "adverse effect" provision. In 1962 the Labor Secretary stipulated that growers who wished braceros had to offer a certain wage (varying from state to state) as proof of a genuine attempt to attract domestic workers before a labor shortage could be declared and braceros imported. But even these "adverse effect" wage rates were unjustly low, since they were based on "prevailing wages" which had been artificially depressed through the long years of the bracero program.

Adverse effect extended into other areas in addition to wage rates. Since braceros left their families in Mexico, barrack housing for single male workers largely replaced the family housing needed by U.S. workers. Working conditions for the imported workers resembled those of slave labor. The Mexican government, negotiating in behalf of its workers, insisted on minimum standards covering wages, food, shelter, medical services, and the like. But once the workers were in the United States, isolated by language and culture, and unfamiliar with their surroundings, they were unable to present grievances effectively; the Mexicans also knew that if they complained they would be deported. Thus the protections negotiated for them—ironically, the protections systematically denied American workers—were seldom enforced.

With this cheap labor supply, the huge corporate farms not only depressed conditions for domestic workers, but also undercut small farmers in the marketplace by producing crops requiring intensive labor more cheaply than they could. California's share of agricultural production rose at the expense of everyone except the corporate farmers.

The evils that result when the power is all on one side in a labor situation are nowhere more clearly demonstrated than here, where growers were able to secure large-scale governmental assistance in obtaining cheap foreign labor, while domestic farm workers had no voice powerful enough to defend their right to their jobs and livelihood. One can readily imagine the public incredulity which would greet the managers of any other giant basic industry, say steel or coal, who after offering less than a living wage, claimed that there was a shortage of labor, and demanded that the government arrange to import thousands of low-wage foreign workers to meet their needs! Of course the existence of strong labor unions in other industries precludes such a possibility, but this is precisely what went on in agriculture for nearly twenty years following the genuine labor shortage during World War II.

One of the major arguments advanced in favor of maintaining the Mexican labor importation program was that it was a valuable "foreign aid" program, in the form of millions of dollars in wages sent back to Mexico by the braceros. It should be pointed out that this foreign aid program—and indeed it was that—was paid for neither by the growers who prospered from it, nor by the general public which supports our other aid programs through taxation, but by the American farm workers who paid for it in artificially depressed wages and in drastic loss of job opportunities. There is no comparable example of workers in any other industry being asked to bear the cost of foreign aid, and once again the results of the lack of union representation are all too apparent.

It was impossible, in the early forties, to visualize the future consequences of the first Mexican bracero agreement. In fact, labor organizers had high hopes that changes in the economy and labor force resulting from the war years would lead to the permanent organization of farm workers. The Mexicans would return home and leave domestic workers to establish fair wage scales and union contracts. It was assumed too, that prewar farm workers who had had experience with factory wages and union contracts would return to agriculture and make similar demands. The increasing transformation of family farms into agribusiness giants was making the "different" status of agriculture harder to maintain; there seemed no longer a logical basis for excluding farm workers from the social legislation which protected workers in other industries.[3]

National Farm Labor Union, AFL

But the sole farm labor development of any consequence during the late forties was the involvement for the first time of the American Federation of Labor on a nationwide basis. In 1946 it granted a charter to the National Farm Labor Union, successor to the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, whose origins and prior history have been described in an earlier chapter. The AFL gave its new farm labor union, headed by H. L. Mitchell, the right to organize locals anywhere in the United States and adjacent islands. It sought to organize small farmers as well as wage hands. The union's monthly newspaper, the *Farm Labor News,* stated: "The National Farm Labor Union accepts as members all persons who earn their living by working on the nation's ranches and plantations. It accepts as members working farmers as well as agricultural workers. It bars from membership persons who are absentee owners of land or those whose prerogatives are farm management."[4]

The newspaper, in addition to providing valuable legislative and organizing information, also reflected themes of rural life and poverty in its dry humor. An example:

> "The worst crop failure I ever saw was back in '98," said the old-timer. "The corn crop was almost nothing. One day Mother cooked some for dinner and Father ate 14 acres at one sitting."[5]

Twenty-six union locals had been organized by November of 1950 and included sugar cane and mill workers in Puerto Rico, cotton choppers in California, dairy farmers in Louisiana, fruit pickers in Florida, and sharecroppers in Arkansas, among others. Strikes were called; the greatest was in 1947 against the DiGiorgio Fruit Corporation in Kern County, California, over the issue of grower recognition of the Union.

DiGiorgio Strike of 1947 and Cotton Strike of 1949

The strike, conducted by Farm Labor Union Local 218, involved workers from Arvin, Lamont, and Weedpatch, small towns near the vast DiGiorgio land holdings. DiGiorgio recruited strikebreakers from the surplus labor supply of Mexican-Americans in Texas. Nine weeks after the onset of the strike 200 out-of-state scabs were at work pruning grape vines; 1,000 more were expected by the end of the season. Government officials openly escorted braceros through the union's picket lines. As one of them later said, "After all, it was our job to see that the [Mexican] nationals got work." According to Ernesto Galarza, NFLU's director of research and education, "On the first day of the strike the braceros stopped work. This show of solidarity with the domestic farm hands was as unexpected as it was embarrassing. The sheriff, Mr. Loustalot, and a representative of the U.S. Department of Agriculture were called

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George Meany

President, AFL-CIO

The AFL-CIO is convinced that America's farm workers—long exploited and long forgotten—are now in the process of building an effective trade union organization. The United Farm Workers Organizing Committee already has awakened the nation's conscience. Even more important, it has demonstrated to farm workers across the country that they can obtain first class citizenship only through self-organization.

We in the AFL-CIO believe that the only effective farm worker union will be one built by the farm workers themselves. For this reason, we have worked with the UFWOC to train and develop its own indigenous leadership. This training already is showing positive results in California, Texas and elsewhere.

We recognize that the struggle to organize farm workers is just beginning. We are determined not to permit these workers to be starved into submission by their powerful and giant employers.

Even as the battle in the fields continues, the AFL-CIO is pledged to eliminate exploitation of the farm workers at the legislative level.

Agricultural workers must have the right to organize and to bargain collectively. There is no logical reason for their continued exclusion from the protection of the National Labor Relations Act.

As the AFL-CIO Executive Council recently declared: "In the most affluent nation of the world, and supposedly the most humane, the substandard status suffered by the three million Americans who work for wages in agriculture can no longer be tolerated."

in. What precisely they told the Mexicans is not known. The braceros went back to work. They continued on the ranch as the mainstay of its labor force during the next six weeks, when the federal government yielded to the protests of the Union and the men were withdrawn. . . . In the month and a half that the corporation had been able to maintain an alien core of strike-breakers it was able to improvise a new work force, which gradually took over after the initial shock of the strike had been fended."[6]

A documentary movie, produced by the Hollywood AFL Film Council, eloquently detailed the violence, poverty, and isolation suffered by the strikers. California unions raised over $250,000 in money, food, and clothes. Lines from a popular DiGiorgio strike ballad ran thus:

> "God Almighty made the Valley
> For a land of milk and honey,
> But a Corporation's got it
> For to turn it into money."[7]

During a union meeting the strike leader, James Price, was seriously injured when shots were fired through a window. Picket lines were maintained for nine months around twenty miles of DiGiorgio property. These lines were prohibited after the courts ruled they were secondary boycotts and illegal under the National Labor Relations Act. This injunction was continued for 17 months while the strikers argued that since they were excluded from the

Strike leader James Price, shot during strike meeting

protection of NLRA, they could not be subject to its provisions. The National Labor Relations Board finally reviewed their case and upheld their position, but by that time the strike had been lost, and with it, the major effort to organize 200,000 California workers.

Two years later, cotton pickers went on strike in California. Growers had cut wages back in 1949 until they were less than the year before; the strikers asked for at least the 1948 wage rates. "During the strike 14 leaders and union organizers were arrested for peacefully picketing on public highways. The strikers were jailed for leading caravans of automobiles on the public roads and calling out to pickers who had not left the fields that a strike was on and the union was demanding an increase in wages."[3] The leader of one caravan was a young man by the name of Cesar Chavez.

The State Conciliation and Mediation Service tried to settle the dispute, but the growers refused to accept its terms. They finally raised wages up to the 1948 level, however, and the men went back to work. Members of the National Farm Labor Union drew clear distinctions between small growers in the area who had met the workers' wage demands and supported them in their struggle, and the large growers who were members of the powerful Associated

Walter P. Reuther

President, Industrial Union
Department, and
United Automobile Workers, AFL-CIO

We ought to be ashamed of the fact that this nation, for all its wealth and prosperity, is far behind most other industrialized countries in giving farm workers the forms of protection and security they need and other American workers have long had. But shame, understanding, sympathy, moral indignation, are not enough.

What the farm workers need most of all is action—in Washington, in state capitals and in the fields—to end the hypocritical double standard by which this whole nation has conspired, actively or through ignorance and indifference, to keep farm workers and their families from their full humanity.

The choice before this country today, after Delano, is not whether American farm workers are to have unions. Those of us who went through similar union struggles in the 1930's are going to continue to help them to organize and, if necessary, to strike to secure their basic rights.

The choice is whether they are going to have them the hard way, after a long period of strife and chaos and suffering because of employer resistance and governmental—which is to say public—callousness. That is the way it has been going; but there is an easier, more rational, more democratic and more humane way.

The journey of farm workers and their families into the mainstream of American life has begun with a struggle to build their own community unions and through them to reach out for the elementary rights so long denied them. The challenge to the rest of us is to insist that the Congress let this better future for farm workers be born without long agony and travail, by giving their unions the protection of NLRA and thereby a chance to bring order and justice into the industry and into their lives.

Farmers and who used their influence to gain the adoption of new county ordinances designed to halt the strike effort.

In 1952 NFLU became the National Agricultural Workers Union. An NAWU organizing effort in 1953 among Louisiana sugar cane workers culminated in a strike. The Louisiana courts issued anti-strike injunctions, which crippled Union activities. The Supreme Court later declared the injunctions illegal, but the damage had been done and the strike was dead.

In 1960 the National Agricultural Workers Union joined the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America, AFL-CIO, which had worked with farm laborers in the past. During the second World War and the farm labor shortage, the Meat Cutters had cooperated with NAWU's predecessor, the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, in bringing over 10,000 Southern workers up the coast to work on farms in New Jersey.

Other unions involved with organizing farm workers faced similar difficulties. According to a California citizens' group, the Emergency Committee to Aid Farm Workers, between 1954 and 1959 "The United Packinghouse Workers of America, AFL-CIO, Local 78, has conducted perhaps ten or twelve strikes in California. . . . Virtually every one of UPWA's strikes has been broken by the unrestricted use of braceros behind the union's picket lines."[9]

Early Union Contracts with Growers

In 1941, the Amalgamated Food and Allied Workers Union, Local 56, an affiliate of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen, signed a contract with Seabrook Farms, one of the largest growers in New Jersey. Seabrook himself came to approve of the role of the union in his operation. He stated: "I don't think we have suffered any from it. We happen to be dealing . . . with quite respectable unions that have very reputable leadership, and we haven't been subjected to any wildcat strikes."[10]

When his son, John M. Seabrook, was President of Seabrook Farms, he commented in 1959: "I think, actually, that the average farm laborer requires . . . a much wider range of skill than the average industrial laborer does. Conditions on a farm are such that the job content changes constantly. You can't break a farm job down into a series of repetitive, easily supervised operations like you can a factory job. I'm an engineer; I've run quite a few factories and I've run quite a few farms. I've never seen an honest job evaluation yet that didn't come to the conclusion that the farm job ought to be paid more than the factory job."[11]

The President's Commission on Migratory Labor found only one other instance of collective bargaining for farm workers (outside of

Hawaii) in its survey conducted in 1950. That contract, now defunct, was signed between the United Packinghouse Workers of America, Local 413, and the Fellsmere Sugar Producers Association, a cane sugar producing and processing concern in Florida. Results of the union involvement were primarily securing the right of promotion from field to plant work, and seniority in hiring and firing. A Fellsmere representative commented, "You have to admit that the union does perform a job for you that [the company] would have to employ people to do for you to maintain labor relations. It makes for more economical operations. There was a time when I didn't think it was so, but I have found it is true."[12]

It is significant that in both the Seabrook and Fellsmere cases, field workers were simply included under the contract for the processing workers, who were covered under the National Labor Relations Act. The processing workers, with their rights to union representation secure under the law, could fight for inclusion of the field workers in the collective bargaining process without endangering their own position.

Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO

On February 5 and 6, 1959, the newly established National Advisory Committee on Farm Labor held public hearings in Wash-

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William L. Kircher

Director of Organization, AFL-CIO

The tragedy in American agriculture is that in thirty years technology and ownership have changed so much while working conditions and human poverty have changed so little.

To continue to deny farm workers a level of citizenship comparable to other workers, on the pretext that they work outside the framework of interstate commerce in an industry that is "different," is to ignore the massive growth of the corporate structure in agribusiness and the factory farm which dominates the industry today.

It is unintelligent to commend collective bargaining for its role in developing stability and high living standards for industrial workers without giving it a chance to perform similarly in solving the many problems of farm workers.

For the first time leadership, right out of the fields, is developing in number and in talent. The trade union spirit of unity and solidarity is abroad among farm workers and their families. The barriers created by racial and nationality differences are crumbling.

There can be no doubting it, this time the farm worker is going to win. He is going to build his own union . . . a union made up of farm workers and led by farm workers. He will build effectively and successfully by the application of the wonderful and flexible machinery of collective bargaining to the unique problems of himself and his fellow workers.

ington, D. C., on the subject of farm labor conditions. Presenting testimony were representatives of labor, church, and civic organizations, as well as several Senators and Congressmen. An editorial in the February 23, 1959, *New York Times* commented: "The National Advisory Committee on Farm Labor has done a signal service by calling public attention to the plight of farm employes in the United States through its recent conference in Washington. . . . While the work of the Committee is research and public education, the Washington sessions have raised the public pressure for badly needed action. . . . Promising, too, was AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Schnitzler's report of a federation plan for a campaign to organize the employes of large corporation farms."

The new campaign was begun later in that same year when the AFL-CIO created the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, under the direction of Norman Smith. By June of 1963 the labor federation had put over $500,000 into farm labor organizing, which centered in California and extended up the Pacific Coast.

AWOC led two principal strikes, one during the January-March lettuce harvest of 1961 in Imperial Valley, the other against the California Packing Corporation in 1962.

During the lettuce strike, "For nearly two months the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, the United Packinghouse Workers of America, and the Government of Mexico insisted that the Department of Labor enforce the law, and remove braceros from the struck area. It did not do so. The lettuce harvest was completed by braceros and the strike was broken."[13]

In the beginning the organizing campaign of the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee was expected to be the strongest ever launched among farm workers. Although its financial support was cut back drastically in mid-1961, it nonetheless had already achieved an impressive record. Largely because of AWOC's activities during 1960 and 1961, "farm wages in California rose about 25% from their mid-1958 levels. The number of Mexican Nationals employed in the state dropped as higher wages attracted more domestic workers. Public pressure generated by the campaign

Hon. *Edward M. Kennedy* U.S. Senator (Massachusetts)

For too many years those concerned with the plight of the American farm laborer have tried in vain to move the conscience of a nation. The time for exhortation has passed, and we in Congress are duty-bound to bring the basic protections of our labor laws to those who provide our most basic need. We will succeed with the assistance and support of all those who strive to insure the presence of equity and justice in our society.

helped to extend disability insurance to agriculture [in California]. . . ."[14]

At the end of 1961, delegates to the Convention of the AFL-CIO voted to expand and intensify the organizing drive in California. The 1961 resolution "calls upon the affiliated unions of the AFL-CIO to support the organizational undertaking financially, by publicity in their newspapers and magazines, by cooperation in the legislative effort on behalf of the hired farm workers, and by direct coordination with the actual organization effort. . . ."[15]

Praising the decision editorially, the *New York Times* stated on December 16, 1961: "Organized labor has demonstrated a sense of social responsibility with its promise of expanded help for the country's two million migratory and seasonal farm workers, the most exploited members of the labor force."

During the same year AWOC held what was reportedly the first organizing conference of farm workers since 1936. Norman Thomas was an invited speaker, and he praised the delegates and pointed to the significance of their meeting: "You're fighting for yourselves and for your children and for your rights . . . but I think that [as] you go on to build a union, it's not just yourselves you're serving—you're serving democracy, you're serving America at its best."[16]

The Ban on Braceros

All organizing efforts during the early sixties dramatized the need to end the massive importation of Mexican workers. After countless strikes were lost through the use of Mexicans, it became obvious that no enduring organizing could be conducted as long as braceros were constantly able to undercut union wage demands.

Time after time in government hearings, members of AWOC and other labor groups, as well as religious and civic organizations, called upon Congress to end the importation program. Congress finally voted to terminate the bracero program (Public Law 78) as of December 31, 1964. Nine months later AWOC and a younger group called the National Farm Workers Association undertook a united strike effort, the results of which are revitalizing the farm labor movement across the country.

The Sixties: Breakthrough

Mississippi

Of the whole current wave of organization, strike, and demonstration activity by farm workers, the first ripple came from Mississippi, as an offshoot of the rapidly expanding civil rights movement. The Mississippi Freedom Labor Union was organized in the fall of 1964 with the help of several groups including the Delta Ministry of the National Council of Churches.

In 1965 the MFLU had 2,000 members, at least 300 of whom went out on a cotton strike in the spring of that year asking for $1.25 an hour and an end to job discrimination. (Said one grower who hired white strikebreakers, "I'm paying the white people the same as I paid the Negroes but I think I'm gonna give them a bonus."[1]) Evictions followed, and many workers lost even the miserable shacks that were their homes.

Ninety per cent of the strikers were "day haul" workers who averaged $3 for a twelve-hour day; the strike effort collapsed when it proved impossible to pull out the stable work force of tractor drivers and the men who transported the day laborers. In areas of such pervasive poverty, strikers are unable to obtain the economic aid they sorely need; while they may have the sympathy of other rural poor, over the long haul these people simply cannot afford to contribute even the minimum necessities. In a situation in which mechanization was making thousands jobless, and alternative work opportunities were few, the union had no economic strength to back its demands.

The achievement of MFLU lay in bringing national attention to the miserable conditions and wages of the plantation workers.

Louisiana

H. L. Mitchell, who will be remembered as one of the founders of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union and as President of its successors, has continued organizing through the years. He heads Local 300 of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen, AFL-CIO, which has organized Gulf Coast dairy workers, rice mill workers, and pogy-boat fishermen, appropriately called "sharecroppers of the sea" because they work for a share of the catch.

He notes the changes in the attitude of the public toward organizing efforts since the old STFU days: "Times have changed in the past twenty-five years. Last summer, another organizer and I were picked up in Pascagoula after being caught in the colored section of town after dark. The sheriff released us with apologies after he found that we were just union organizers and not the advance guard of the civil rights movement."[2]

Another organizing drive is currently under way among sugar workers of Louisiana. More than 500 men and women have signed up with Local 300. Because the workers earn $1 an hour and less, the ten-dollar initiation fee is paid in ten weekly installments, and half of the initiation fee is deposited in a credit union. The workers are using the credit union funds to buy land and build self-help housing. Sugar cane workers risk eviction from their homes, for many still live in the plantation-owned cabins inhabited by their ancestors in the days of slavery. Local 300 is trying to sign up a majority of plantation workers so it can insist that the plantation owners bargain with them.

The obstacles were summarized by one worker: "If I try to get a home of my own, the plantation owners won't like it. If I join the credit union, the storekeeper won't like it. If I join a union, I'm afraid I will lose my job."[3] But the workers know that the only answer to the economic power wielded against them is to develop their own economic strength.

Hon. *Robert F. Kennedy* U.S. Senator (New York)

Lacking the protections of the National Labor Relations Act, farm workers' efforts to organize and gain bargaining recognition have been ungoverned and unregulated tests of economic strength with employers far wealthier and more powerful than they. No legal consequence has attached to the fact that a union could demonstrate support from a majority of the workers whom it seeks to represent. There has been no way to require that an election be held among the workers. Most recognition strikes over the years have consequently failed, and employers have remained able to dictate the terms and conditions of work.

California

Union efforts continued to make small gains for California's farm workers, although strikes were unsuccessful and workers' attention turned increasingly toward voter registration to build a base of political power from which to challenge the domination of the growers. This became feasible as more and more migrants settled into permanent communities in several areas of the state.

In 1964 and 1965, the impact of a number of factors developing in the national picture began to converge in California, bringing a tremendous stimulus to the unions, which had been too weak to win but were too much needed to die. One was the growth of national awareness of poverty, which brought demands for new government programs to combat it and at the same time encouraged the aspirations of the poor. Another was the successful militancy of the civil rights movement, which stirred all minorities toward action and developed trained leadership for wider service. And the direct spark was probably the success of the long campaign to end the importation of Mexican contract workers under P.L. 78.

Thus deprived of their usual cheap labor supply at the end of 1964, some growers turned to the Immigration and Nationality Act (P.L. 414) to obtain the same workers through a different channel. But the U.S. Department of Labor had set criteria under which growers had to prove they had seriously attempted to recruit domestic farm workers, before the Labor Secretary could certify the existence of a labor shortage and permit importation of foreign workers. In California, these criteria included a basic "adverse effect" wage of $1.40 an hour. Many American workers naturally reasoned that they were entitled to at least this wage whether or not their employer was requesting foreign workers.

The first major farm labor struggle after the end of the Mexican bracero program occurred in California's 1965 grape harvest. The largest grower was the DiGiorgio Corporation, which also grows other field crops, and against which the union struggle had gone on intermittently for nearly a generation. Second in size was Schenley Industries, the nationally known liquor distributors.*

The grape industry is not typical of California agriculture. It is a highly skilled, twelve-month-a-year operation. Cultivation tech-

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* For all practical purposes, the California grape industry owes its life to federally financed irrigation. It was a DiGiorgio—a Sicilian immigrant with vineyard experience from the old country—who first started vines in the sagebrush country of the San Joaquin Valley about 130 miles northwest of Los Angeles. The water table dropped steadily until the expense of drilling wells became prohibitive for all but the largest operators. The industry was rescued by the Friant-Kern Canal of the Central Valleys Project of the Federal Bureau of Reclamation, and the cost of supplying water is now estimated at $700 an acre; growers pay only $123 and the rest is borne by the taxpayers and users of Project electric power. The 160 acres-per-owner limitation on land irrigated by federal water projects (which are sup-

Striking grape workers

George Ballis

niques have been refined through years of experimentation, and the skill goes back generations to its European origin. Delicate hand operations of pruning and cultivating go on at regular intervals through the winter, so that a large resident labor force is needed, as well as additional thousands for the summer harvest.

During May, 1965, members of the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO, struck successfully in the Coachella Valley to increase wages from $1.20 to the $1.40 "adverse effect" rate (and to raise the piece work incentive from 15 to 25 cents a box). When they moved into Delano for the second grape harvest, the wages offered were only $1.20 plus 10 cents a box, and they renewed the Coachella wage demands.

Meanwhile, the National Farm Workers Association in Delano had been winning a different kind of struggle—against a rent increase for the 20-year-old metal shacks, without windows or running water, which constituted public housing just outside the Delano grape area.

The remarkable leader of this Association was the Cesar Chavez who had headed a caravan in the National Farm Labor Union cotton strike years before. Chavez, whose father had come from Mexico, was born in 1927 on his grandfather's farm in Yuma, Arizona. During the depression the farm was foreclosed. The family migrated to California and started moving with the crops. Chavez first worked in Delano in 1937, when he was ten. He returned from time to time, and eventually married a girl whose family were resident vineyard workers there.

Like other Mexican-American farm workers, Chavez encountered both discrimination and abject poverty. Chavez was once arrested in Delano while sitting with his wife in a movie house—he had refused to comply with the theatre's policy of seating Mexican-Americans on one side, Anglos on the other.

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posed to benefit family farmers, not giant corporations) has been so loosely enforced that DiGiorgio's acreage is still 4,600 and Schenley's 3,500.

One fall the family picked grapes near Fresno. Each week the labor contractor said he could not pay them since he had not yet been paid himself. "At the end of the seventh week," Chavez recalls, "we went to the contractor's house and it was empty—he owed us for seven weeks' pay, and we haven't seen him to this day."[4]

Over the years Chavez attended more than 30 schools. He had gotten as far as eighth grade when he dropped out completely to help support the family. But he was an avid reader and his informal education continued. In 1952 he met Fred Ross, an organizer for Saul Alinsky's Community Service Organization which was working among the Spanish-speaking in California. Chavez took a job as organizer for CSO and in 1959 became its director. In 1962 he quit CSO and moved with his wife and children back to Delano, by then a community of 13,500.

"I had some ideas on what should be done," he said of his new commitment. "No great plans; just that it would take an awful lot of work to organize farm workers. It was a gamble. I went around for about 11 months and I went to about 87 communities and labor camps and in each place I'd find a few people who were committed to doing something; something had happened in their lives and they were ready for it."[5]

The movement Chavez was building owed much to his community organization background. Wages and working conditions were basic, of course, but the primary objective was to have the workers share in the decisions that affected their lives. Through the National Farm Workers Association they began to develop services to meet their own needs—a credit union, a cooperative store, a newspaper, and later, a health clinic.

Thus when the AWOC workers, mostly Filipinos, returned to Delano with their demand for a $1.40 minimum and a successful

Cesar Chavez

Director, United Farm Workers
Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO

What elements went into making the Delano strike as difficult, yet as successful, as it has been?

First, the concept of a union for farm workers is like an idea whose time for birth has come. The hour is here. We can never be so bold to think that it was merely "our" strategy that brought the Schenley and DiGiorgio contracts into being. It was that, plus the years of suffering, planning, organizing, striking, and learning which went before. Some of the DiGiorgio workers, for example, had participated in as many as three prior DiGiorgio strikes.

Second, it cannot be emphasized too often that there is a basic maxim which must apply wherever success is to occur: You cannot organize and strike at the same time. The powers are too great on the side of the opposition; in California, for example, we found that the grower was but a small part of the opposition, for beside and behind him stood bankers, politicians, Birchers, and pro-grower unions.

Third, due to the fact that the farm worker is excluded from the basic protective labor legislation, a strong, broad coalition of forces must be available strike behind them, they found in the resident Mexican-American workers a community that was equally well organized, had tasted some victories, and shared both the dissatisfaction and the militancy of the AWOC members.

The growers made no response to the demand for a wage increase and on September 8, about 600 to 800 AWOC workers under the leadership of Larry Itliong struck 34 ranches. They demanded higher wages, improved working conditions, and, later, a union contract. (On one farm in the Delano area, 67 workers had to drink water from a single, empty beer can. Lacking state-required portable toilets, the workers had to relieve themselves in the fields.) Eight days later 1,100 members of the National Farm Workers Association joined the AWOC strikers. Chavez had hesitated because he thought NFWA was not yet ready for so crucial an undertaking, but within a few days he realized that this strike of fellow workers had to be supported. From then on until the two unions merged, a joint committee was in command. "Huelga" (Strike) became the workers' rallying cry.

Only the largest ranches were struck: Schenley, the Sierra Vista Ranch of DiGiorgio, and others that employed thousands. The growers responded in traditional fashion by returning registered union letters unopened, hiring strikebreakers, denying the existence of a strike, and harrassing pickets. Trucks and tractors were driven near to choke the pickets with dust. Picket signs were riddled with bullets and the strikers sprayed with insecticide. Injunctions to limit picketing were secured and groups were arrested for unlawful assembly. Workers who had lived for years on grower property were evicted.

The State Employment Service certified the existence of a labor dispute at 28 ranches and so refused to supply any more workers.

willing to throw their full weight into the battle. We have found that in lieu of elections and democratic procedures for getting labor and management together, sheer economic pressure must be employed. The tool of the strike is only a starting point. The best weapon yet devised to complement the strike is the boycott; and the boycott means coalesced, public power. A simple rule for us is: "Don't be too proud to ask for help." In Delano help came from all corners . . . university campuses, churches, organized labor, political organizations, and minority groups.

Finally, the nature of the union being built is of great importance. If the union which is offered to the workers is simply that of a neat business operation with no heart, the workers will scoff; they will turn it down cold. The union must hold out concrete programs which guarantee a new life. Cooperatives, credit unions, educational programs of a practical nature, money saving devices . . . these are necessary elements of any union planning on capturing the imagination of the farm worker. It must be grass roots with a vengeance. The most mundane office work to the most sophisticated bargaining must be broken into steps which farm workers can learn, if it is to be their union.

Although the growers were able to obtain strikebreakers elsewhere, the unions were successful in keeping many workers out of the fields. They traveled as far as Texas to persuade potential recruits not to break the strike. And often a crew of strikebreakers would leave to join the strike. The total number of strikers became greater than the number of workers regularly employed. It was said that tons of grapes were spoiled in packing by untrained workers. The growers also suffered economically when members of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union refused to cross AWOC-NFWA picket lines on the San Francisco docks, and Delano grapes destined for export went back into storage.

Crucial to the ability of the unions to maintain the strike, as the months dragged on, was support from outside sympathizers. Though large donations were occasionally made, the strike was sustained during the early months by small individual contributions averaging $5.56.[6] The AFL-CIO was, of course, financing AWOC. Its Industrial Union Department contributed $2,000 to the strike treasury, and in December the United Auto Workers gave $5,000, pledging that amount monthly for the duration. The AFL-CIO Convention, meeting in San Francisco in December, 1965, pledged its support to the strikers.

Most notable right from the start was the help of the Migrant Ministry of the California Council of Churches, which lent staff

The Rev. ***Wayne C. Hartmire, Jr.***

Director, California Migrant Ministry

There is no doubt that Protestant churches have a traditional commitment to social justice. But that tradition has been betrayed time and again by silent acceptance of injustice and by elevating institutional self-preservation above the needs of suffering men and women. In Delano in 1965-67, local churches continued that betrayal, but other Christians rallied to the cause of the striking grape pickers. There are many reasons why this support developed.

Cesar Chavez and the early leaders of the NFWA represent the most important reason. They built a grass roots labor organization that was run by farm workers, paid for by farm workers and targeted on the needs that farm workers feel most keenly. Given a farm workers' union that is on the move with effective leadership, it was relatively easy for concerned churchmen to lend support without dominating or distorting the movement.

From the beginning, the California Migrant Ministry and its supporters and sponsoring denominations were accused of taking sides and fomenting conflict. The churches of the agricultural valleys exploded with hostility and dissension—and that phase has not yet run its course. Through it all, those churchmen who were closest to the strikers insisted that elemental justice demands the organization of farm workers. If the Church is to give flesh to its faith, then Christians must put the institution and their own bodies on the line in support of the workers. It is everyman's right to expect that the Church in California and elsewhere will be willing to take risks for the sake of a servant ministry to men in need—a ministry that insists on social justice—even at cost.

Cesar Chavez speaks at State Capitol, Sacramento

Gerhard Gscheidle

members and secured assistance from other church groups despite severe criticism from the Delano Ministerial Association. Catholic support came later, and also held firm under attack. Volunteer pickets joined in and freed some strikers to maintain themselves with temporary jobs elsewhere. CORE and SNCC helped not only in the strike but in organizing a nationwide consumer boycott effort, which was first aimed at Schenley products.

National attention and support suddenly swelled, however, when in March of 1966, the unions decided on a march from Delano to Sacramento, the state capital 300 miles away. The march, half union demonstration and half religious pilgrimage, was exciting and colorful and in its 25 days engendered widespread publicity and sympathy. As the marchers passed through the small towns on the way to Sacramento, individuals and groups turned out to march with them for a time, and many offered food and beds to those going on to the capital. The marchers varied in number from forty to hundreds and, at the culmination in an Easter meeting on the Capitol building steps, they exceeded 8,000.

Meanwhile, William Kircher, AFL-CIO Director of Organization, was able to establish communication between the strikers and Schenley. As the marchers neared Sacramento on April 6, Schenley signed an agreement recognizing NFWA as sole bargaining agent for its workers in Kern and Tulare counties, and stipulating contract negotiations within 30 days. Although the Governor did not appear at the Easter rally, and the State Legislature did not take up the question of collective bargaining, national pressure, intensified by the march, was instrumental in bringing about Schenley's recognition of NFWA. Negotiations with Schenley resulted in a contract signed June 21, 1966, providing for a $1.75 an hour minimum, fringe benefits, and a union shop and hiring hall.

Gaining recognition from DiGiorgio proved more difficult. After an election boycotted by the striking unions (and the majority of the workers) and disallowed by a government-appointed referee, the consumer boycott, directed against DiGiorgio products after the Schenley victory, was stepped up and began to make an impression.

To counter attempts by the Teamsters to split their unity, NFWA and AWOC merged into the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee and obtained a charter from the AFL-CIO. In a representation election in the DiGiorgio fields late in August, the new United Farm Workers defeated the Teamsters and won the right to negotiate with DiGiorgio at its Sierra Vista Ranch.

UFWOC then pressed for recognition at other DiGiorgio locations and again met both corporation and Teamster opposition; but they won at the largest, King Ranch in Arvin. In early fall, Christian Brothers and the Novitiate Winery voluntarily recognized the union. In November, 1966, UFWOC won its most impressive representation election victory, 285 to 38, at Mosesian-Hourigan-Goldberg, a small Delano firm. The strike continues against some 30 growers.*

On April 1, 1967, the long-awaited results of arbitration between UFWOC and three of DiGiorgio's four California ranches were made public. (The terms will also apply to DiGiorgio's Marysville ranch if the representation election there on July 18, 1967,

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* Events move swiftly in Delano. For current information on boycotts, strikes and other developments write UFWOC.

Thomas L. Pitts

Executive Secretary, California
Labor Federation, AFL-CIO

Efforts to organize farm workers in the nation's largest agricultural state—gross farm income in California this year is expected to top $4 billion—have been long and colorful. What has perhaps made the Delano effort unique is the high degree of indigenous farm worker leadership in the UFWOC and the ability of the union to reflect the desires, goals, frustrations and feelings of California farm workers.

The Delano grape strike has involved the entire community in the struggle to achieve democracy at the job-site. This has helped to weld a coalition of concerned urban residents, churchmen, civil rights groups, liberals, and trade unionists. Such a coalition is crucial to successful farm worker organization. Without it, the unionization of farm workers would be extremely difficult, if not impossible.

Farm workers have been denied their rightful place in the nation's economy for many years; they are now attempting to rectify this sorry situation. They will succeed because history is on their side—but all groups in the economy will benefit if their success comes within the framework of the National Labor Relations Act.

results in a UFWOC victory.) According to J. Max O'Neill, President of DiGiorgio, the contract "will, in all likelihood, establish precedents for collective bargaining agreements in California and other agricultural states."[7] In addition to fairly substantial wage hikes, a special fund was established which includes health and welfare, dental, pension, and insurance benefits. DiGiorgio will pay an initial $25,000 into the fund, and contribute 5 cents an hour per employee. Other aspects of the contract cover vacations, holidays, unemployment insurance, hiring, and leaves of absence.

La Huelga and the march on Sacramento changed the farm labor situation in the whole country sharply and dramatically, but the California victories are only a beginning. Not even the grape industry is fully organized as yet, and the bulk of California agriculture remains intransigent. Efforts in other areas and crops will doubtless continue until all the state's farm workers are unionized and able to act effectively in the face of the growers' overwhelming economic power and political influence. But the financial cost of the Delano effort alone is staggering. The total bill is $40,000 a month, of which the AFL-CIO pays $10,000. UFWOC is still dependent upon food supplies pledged by supporters. "One union has pledged 100 dozen eggs a week (in all, the strikers use 200 dozen); another, 40 pounds of hamburger; and a bakery in Los Angeles sends up, daily, 100 loaves of day-old bread."[8] Even now, food sometimes runs out, and support of every kind is still vital.

United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO
Box 130
Delano, California 93215

Texas

Texas sends out more migrants than any other state in the union, but it is also the year-round home for an estimated two million farm workers, mostly seasonal. It is their home poverty that leads so many of them to follow the crops elsewhere. The migrant stream they comprise fans out to the Rocky Mountain states, the Midwest, and the North Central States. The Texas workers are thus well situated to serve as a link to carry news of farm worker organizing, and it is not surprising that union activity developed next in Texas. A large percentage of the Texas workers are Mexican-Americans, too, so there was a common cultural as well as economic tie with the Huelga movement in California.

Starr County, in the lower Rio Grande Valley on the Mexican border, is the home base for thousands of migrants and one of the poorest counties in the United States. Average per capita income is $1,568. Farm workers earn an estimated 50 to 85 cents an hour, and about 75 per cent of the county population migrates in search of work. Since 90 per cent of the people in the county are Mexican-American, sympathy for the farm workers is almost universal.[9]

Starr County, then, appeared to be ready for organizing. When Eugene Nelson, one of Chavez's strike captains, came to Texas to organize the boycott against Schenley products there, he was asked to help the farm workers in the Rio Grande Valley organize. News of success in California encouraged the workers. By the end of May, Nelson had signed up 700 and announced the formation of the Independent Workers' Association.

A strike was called on June 1, 1966, and pickets appeared at three of the larger melon farms and five packing sheds. The workers asked for $1.25 an hour and a union contract. Within 24 hours the growers had obtained a temporary restraining order prohibiting pickets at the farms initially struck. Picketing continued at other farms and the strike idea was kept alive by local marches and rallies. The growers sent trucks daily to the border bridge to pick up the "green card" Mexican workers* used as strikebreakers, and daily the pickets were there to dissuade the Mexicans. The strike impact was greatly lessened, however, when much of the crop was damaged by heavy rains.

Help in the form of food and money came from unions, from local priests, and from the Bishops' Committee for the Spanish Speaking. Toward the end of June, more than a thousand members of the independent union voted to affiliate with the National Farm Workers Association. But by this time many of the workers had headed north for other seasonal farm jobs, and others would follow. The full-scale drive for organization had to wait for fall, the return of the migrants, and the new Texas harvest season.

It was decided to adopt a California tactic and dramatize the plight of the workers by a march across the state to the capital, nearly 400 miles away. The original idea had been to support the strike but it quickly turned into a demand that the Governor call a special session of the legislature to enact a $1.25 minimum wage law. A Catholic priest, Father Antonio Gonzales, and a Baptist Minister, the Rev. James L. Novarro, served as coordinators. On July 4, 74 marchers started out, and about 25 made the entire trip. Support came from the state AFL-CIO and from many individual unions. Churches provided meals and overnight accommodations along the way. Local groups (unions, students, civil rights workers) joined the march through their own areas so that it became a continuing demonstration, much larger than its permanent core.

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* "Green-carders" are so called from their green visa for permanent entry into the U.S. under provisions of Public Law 414. Although permitted to remain in the U.S., many "green-carders" recross the border each night, and since they can live more cheaply on the Mexican side, they are competing unfairly with the American workers, who cannot live on the same low wages.

Sixty-two-year-old Reyes Alaniz marched all the way. "I am doing it with my own heart," he said. "I have already wasted all my life in the fields. . . . I passed the hard way. I don't want the new generation to struggle like I did."[10]

San Antonio's Archbishop, the Most Rev. Robert Emmet Lucey, endorsed the minimum wage demand in a Mass on August 27:

> "No sane man would consider that a fair wage in these days. . . . We join you . . . only because you have known the sorrow of cruel wages in the past and this objective is a step in the right direction. . . . A wage of a dollar and a quarter an hour is ghastly recompense for exhausting labor under the burning sun of Texas."[11]

Senator Ralph Yarborough joined the marchers on the final day and was the key speaker at the Labor Day rally attended by some 10,000 people; he endorsed the $1.25 demand unequivocally. The Governor had met the marchers five days before, but avoided them when they reached the Capitol. He disapproved the march tactic, and did not call a special session. Signs carried at the rally said, "Remember, we can vote," and "Search your soul, Governor, this is the twentieth century."

H. S. Hank Brown

President, Texas State AFL-CIO

The nature of the problems involved in organizing farm workers differs in some degree depending upon the area of the country we are talking about. We in Texas must still, for now, depend on congressmen from other states for necessary federal legislation. We have no more than five or six out of 23 congressmen who will vote for any progressive social legislation whatsoever. Inclusion of farm laborers under the NLRA coverage is an absolute necessity if there are to be any permanent organizational successes. There must be large scale political education and registration of Mexican-Americans to not only elect responsible congressmen and state legislators, but to rid the Rio Grande Valley of reactionary sheriffs, school boards, mayors and city councilmen.

The labor movement and the church, particularly the Catholic Church in Texas, must help poor people to organize because they are the best equipped to do so. The strike of the farm workers in Rio Grande City took everyone by surprise, but enlisted a coalition which never existed before. Organized labor and the church marched beside a rag-tag army of students, many of whom were anti-clerics, most of whom thought labor was getting too fat, and it has done all of us good. Most Mexican-American farm workers are Catholic, and there can be no more effective organizer than a priest who remembers what the Vatican Council was all about and gets out in the streets and fields where his flock are.

Following the rally, two workers were left to maintain a vigil on the Capitol steps, and the plan was to continue it until the legislature convened. (A minister and a labor organizer were later arrested on charges of "disturbing the janitor in the performance of his duties" as they took their turn at this quiet appeal to conscience.)

Meanwhile, strike action continued against twelve of the largest corporate farms. More workers struck as the fall lettuce harvest began. The drive to dissuade Mexican workers from strikebreaking continued with such success—despite the jailing of pickets at the Roma International Bridge—that it was expanded to include all bridges along the border from Matamores to Tijuana. The arrest of the strikers was based on an old state law prohibiting secondary picketing, a law which had been ruled unconstitutional by the Texas Supreme Court back in 1949.

On November 16, 1966, a report issued by a Starr County grand jury called the farm workers' strike "unlawful and un-American," and "abusive of rights and freedoms granted them as citizens."

Eugene Nelson

Texas Organizer, United Farm Workers
Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO

I think the three greatest problems inherent in the organizing of farm workers are 1) their exclusion from the National Labor Relations Act; 2) the fact that many farm workers are migrants, and their continued participation in union activities is difficult to count on; 3) the comparative lack of education of farm workers.

For large-scale unionization of farm workers to be possible in the reasonably near future, coverage under the National Labor Relations Act is absolutely essential. If they are not soon covered, farm worker unions will continue to win contracts, as in Delano, but slowly, at great expense and perhaps with the accompaniment of considerable violence.

The problem of the migration of workers will tend to be solved as other problems are solved and other benefits gained. For example, here in Starr County, Texas, fewer workers will migrate this spring as a result of more packing shed jobs being opened up by changes in the wage and hour law. Wages for those shed workers covered under Federal law were raised from $1.25 an hour to $1.40 on February 1, 1967; the law provides time-and-a-half for overtime for the first time to these workers. As a result, management is putting more people to work, at the higher wages, to avoid paying overtime.

The problem of education should be attacked on two fronts. The more unions are helped to organize and gain contracts for the workers, the fewer will be forced to migrate, and more children will remain in school. At the same time, more schools for those children still migrating are needed to educate them to better cope with their problems as a whole.

New changes are needed to eliminate violations of the spirit and intent of the immigration law. It is unthinkable that the United States Government should allow Mexican citizens to cross the border daily into Starr County to break a strike of U.S. citizens living in abject poverty.

The grand jury report continued, "The means as are practiced by the union group in Starr County are directly contrary to everything that we know in our American and lawful way of life." The report called for the President to send men to the area "to assist in preserving the rights of all concerned," and for representatives of the attorney general's office and a Texas Ranger to remain in the county to assist local officers "during these extraordinary times."[12]

These shocking statements, made in a country where nearly all workers exercise the basic right to organize and bargain collectively, are incredible. The report complained of violence and threats by farm workers. There have been absolutely no worker-instigated acts of violence; even the rally of 10,000 farm labor sympathizers, which Governor Connally refused to endorse for fear of rioting, was orderly and without incident.

In January, 1967, Jesus Salas, head of a Wisconsin farm labor union, spent two weeks in his home town of Crystal City, Texas, where the population is 70 to 80 per cent Mexican-American. He noted changes in the political situation since the abolition of the poll tax. Now political organizations are developing in the Mexican-American "barrios," or neighborhoods. Salas feels deeply that part of the solution to farm labor problems must be political. He describes an address he gave to a political rally in Crystal City: "I told them that the few Mexican-Americans from a 'barrio' who have had the opportunity to obtain an education must involve themselves politically."

He put the grim Texas struggle into stark perspective:

"The strike doesn't put economic pressure on the company because 'greencarders' are available. . . . A law against mass pickets says that demonstrators must be separated by a distance of 50 feet. The farms are huge and a picket may not have much effect because it passes nearly unobserved. . . . I never saw more Texas Rangers in one area in my life than there are in Roma."[13]

Hon. *Henry B. Gonzalez* U.S. Representative (Texas)

Farm workers have traditionally been isolated from each other and from the rest of society, and so have suffered from lower wages and poorer working conditions than others who have enjoyed greater organization and contact with the mainstream of American life.

It is clear that organization is the key to solving the dilemma of the farm workers in this country. Only through organization is it possible for farm workers to speak with one voice. Without that one voice, little or nothing can be heard of the plaints of farm workers. I hope that agricultural workers over the country will unite and work for recognition of their needs and solution of their problems.

Overwhelming support was given the strikers at Eastertime in 1967 when the Catholic Bishops of Texas released an unequivocal statement calling on farm workers to organize:

> We, the Catholic Bishops of Texas, would remind farm workers that among the basic rights of a human person is the right of freely founding associations or unions for working people. . . . Included is the right of freely taking part in the activities of these unions without risk of reprisal. In view of the present depressed state of farm workers . . . we say that they have a duty to form and join unions or associations. . . .[14]

The statement also made a firm plea for the extension of the National Labor Relations Act to cover farm workers.

That same Easter weekend some 250 college students and some of their teachers formed a "Caravan for Justice," and retraced the 400-mile path the marchers had taken to the capital. Fifty-three cars were loaded with two tons of food and medicine for the strikers, together with $2,300 raised for the strike effort.

Those who had participated in the march the previous summer noted a slight change in the attitude town officials and citizens took toward the Caravan for Justice. In Rio Grande City, the strike center and scene of many arrests of strikers and their supporters, a rally on the courthouse steps proceeded undisturbed. Said Erasmo Andrade, chairman of the Valley Farm Workers Assistance Committee: "We were amazed. For the first time, the townspeople seemed friendly. Maybe things are changing. . . ."[15]

Unprecedented action by Mexico's powerful labor union, the "Confederación de Trabajadores" on May 11, 1967, gave new support to the Texas strikers. Starting before dawn, seventeen Mexican members of a brick-makers union picketed *their* side of the Roma International Bridge in a successful move to stop the flow of strikebreakers into Texas. Waving the familiar red and black strike banners and chanting "Viva la Huelga," the Mexican pickets confronted their own countrymen with the strike message. Virtually all Mexican fieldhands stayed on their side of the Rio Grande that day. Said David Lopez of the AFL-CIO: "We understand we stopped about 120 of the 200 who were there yesterday."[16]

The farm workers' battle continues on a second front. They want a state minimum wage law. Over a thousand supporters turned out for a state senate hearing on a proposed bill, but the hearing was postponed at the last minute. The same thousand then congregated on the Capitol steps to listen to Hank Brown, President of the Texas AFL-CIO, say: "Texas has more poverty stricken people than any state in the union. A minimum wage law would go a long way towards ending this deplorable condition. And we're going to march and demonstrate until Texas has a wage law."[17]

Texas farm workers are digging in for the long haul.

United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO
P.O. Box 54
Rio Grande City, Texas 78582

Wisconsin

The organizing struggles in Texas and Wisconsin are closely bound together, for many of the Texas workers migrate to Wisconsin for summer work. They go mainly to Waushara County where they harvest pickle cucumbers, sugar beets, potatoes, and cherries. In 1966, there were about 4,000 migrants in the area, and as the news of organizing spread, the workers felt a close bond with both the Texas and California strikers.

A union of predominantly Spanish-speaking workers, Obreros Unidos (United Workers), was formed under the leadership of Jesus Salas. It is, says Salas, "united in spirit" with the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee although not formally affiliated. Obreros Unidos, like the movements in Texas, Michigan, and Florida, uses the symbol of the black thunderbird which had been raised by the California strikers and became known across the country through the 1965 consumer boycotts.

In August, 1966, members of the Obreros Unidos and their supporters undertook a four-day, 90-mile "march for respectability" to the state Capitol in Madison and, as in other states, they were joined en route by numbers of supporters. The Chairman of the State Industrial Commission promised hearings on the marchers' demand for a $1.25 minimum wage. When the workers asked for representation on the Governor's Commission on Migratory Labor, they were invited to nominate representatives for appointment.

Salas and a group of workers stayed in Wisconsin over the 1966-67 winter to build support for the union and its demands throughout the state, and have kept in close touch with their members who work in Texas during the winter.

The Very Rev. Msgr. William J. Quinn

**Director, Bishops' Committee
for the Spanish Speaking**

It is amazing that the "People of God" would remain over so many years oblivious to the plight of the poor agricultural workers. It is not too late. Federal and state legislation is still a possibility. Those of us who believe in the dignity of all men and the concern of God for the poor must work unstintingly until God and his poor have been rightly served by the improvement of the lot of agricultural workers.

Salas has spoken of the need for collective bargaining for farm workers, and, making a contrast with Texas, pointed to Wisconsin's recently passed minimum wage of $1.25: "I have always said we are achieving gains here due partially to Wisconsin's progressive legislation." The climate is different in Texas. There, according to Salas, "the press and television have been mocking the strike. They completely ignore the attempts or make fun of them."[18]

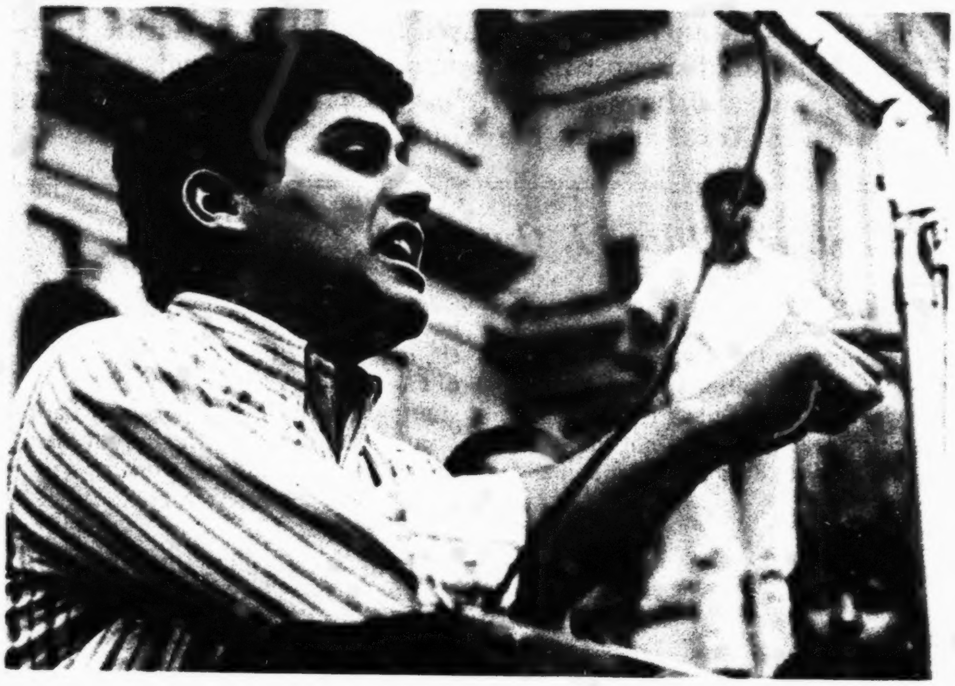
The struggles in Wisconsin and Texas mean everything to the workers. Apart from the hope of immediate progress, as an elderly Texas striker told Salas, "I have lived in poverty and misery all my life and I live in poverty during the strike . . . but now I can walk with dignity."[19]

Obreros Unidos (United Workers)
17 South Bassette Street
Madison, Wisconsin 53703

Michigan

Organizing efforts were begun in Michigan in the 1966 summer season. By March, 1967, the workers felt ready for a march to the state capital—by now proven a successful tactic for dramatizing their needs. Michigan uses more migratory farm workers than any other northern state; they work mainly in the pickle cucumber, cherry, and strawberry crops.

The 70-mile "March for Migrants" from Saginaw to Lansing was timed to reach the capital on Easter Sunday. Some 30 state and local organizations endorsed the march, and hundreds turned out along the way. Rallies were held in churches in major centers as they passed, and it was pointed out that the march spoke for the thousands who would not arrive in Michigan until May. Supporting telegrams came from Chavez and the United Farm Work-



Jesus Salas speaks at Michigan State Capitol ers Organizing Committee as well as from U.S. Senators Philip A. Hart of Michigan and Robert Kennedy of New York.

A Declaration of Grievances presented to Lt. Gov. William G. Milliken called for better wages, housing, and education, and for workmen's compensation. The March was organized by the Concerned Citizens for Migrant Workers, and speakers included the Bishop of Lansing and representatives of the state AFL-CIO, the NAACP, and the National Campaign for Agricultural Democracy.

Michigan has thus been made aware of its farm workers and their demands, but the real organizing is yet to come, as the thousands of migrants pour into the state for the 1967 season.

Concerned Citizens for Migrant Workers
Box 5271, 2516 Marfitt Street
East Lansing, Michigan 48823

Florida

On the Atlantic Coast, Florida is a home base for workers in one of the country's three major migrant streams, and also is a large employer of seasonal farm labor in its own right. Florida, like California, has long used great numbers of foreign workers—mainly British West Indians who work in the sugar harvest and also in fruits and vegetables. But while California has made considerable progress in shifting to domestic workers, Florida is the only state that still depends heavily on foreign workers—always an indication of poor wages and working conditions for domestics. The Florida-based migrants work in citrus and vegetable crops during the winter and then move up the coast. Many stop in Virginia for the apple

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Nicholas A. Zonarich

Organizational Director,
Industrial Union Department, AFL-CIO

Migratory workers have been called "rented slaves." Along the Eastern Seaboard that term becomes more bitter when it is realized that more than 95 per cent of the 300,000 farm workers who follow the crops from Florida to New England are Negroes.

These workers are kept in an economic bondage that condemns them to a level of bare existence.

The first job to be done is to shatter this pattern of exploitation. And the way to do that is through organization.

In Florida, alone, more than 20,000 workers have signed cards expressing their willingness—their determination—to join a union.

We of the IUD are assisting in the implementation of an organizing program for farm workers on the East Coast of Florida, in close cooperation with the United Packinghouse Workers of America, AFL-CIO.

Organization is the key to economic progress for workers; and economic progress is the road to the basic social change needed to wipe out the shame of "rented slavery" in our nation.

harvest and then go on to New Jersey or New York, but some travel as far north as the New England States.

The Belle Glade area of Florida has perhaps the largest concentration of seasonal farm workers, about 22,000 at peak. As farm labor unrest appeared across the country, a few small and sporadic strikes over wage increases broke out spontaneously in the summer of 1965, but no serious organizing efforts were made until 1966. Then when workers appealed to the AFL-CIO for assistance, the Industrial Union Department sent its regional director in from North Carolina. Organizational problems immediately developed, one of which centered around whether the best way to reach workers would be to organize crew leaders first. (Although crew leaders are often primarily employers and thus part of the exploiting system, in many cases they are simply group leaders and spokesmen for the workers, and as field workers themselves, they suffer the same conditions of poverty.)

The International Laborers Union first attempted the organizing drive during the winter of 1966-67, but their charter was turned in and reissued to the United Packinghouse Workers. On election night in November, 1966, some 400 representatives of Florida's farm workers met in Miami's Bayfront Park to sign a petition to Florida's Governor-elect asking to be treated like "human beings." The *Miami News* reported: "Florida, and Dade County, especially, have seen other movements in behalf of migrants come and go. . . . Never before, however, has the migrants' cause been espoused by a group as well-organized and muscular. . . ."[20]

One of the reasons was the formation of the Coordinating Committee for Farm Workers, a coalition of eight Florida groups including the Florida Citizens Committee on Farm Labor, the NAACP, the Migrant Ministry, the American Friends Service Committee, the Florida Council on Human Relations, the Diocese of

Jack T. Conway

Executive Director, Industrial
Union Department, AFL-CIO

In the small, sun-dappled town of Delano, California, determined grape workers walked out of the vineyards in September, 1965, and hoisted a banner with a single word emblazoned on it: Huelga!

What was started by these grape strikers in the San Joaquin Valley in California has become a widening struggle against a tremendous problem of national proportions which directly or indirectly already involves all farm workers.

Battling with great courage against formidable odds, the grape strikers have established a firm foundation for a successful farm workers' union. Out of this can grow—must grow—one big national union for farm workers.

The efforts in California, in Texas, in Florida, New Jersey, New York, Wisconsin, and Michigan—wherever farm workers are found—must be welded into a national pattern of activity with one objective: one national farm workers' union.

Miami, the Community Action Fund (an antipoverty group), and the Industrial Union Department of the AFL-CIO. This influential group is concerned with living and working conditions of farm workers and with federal programs to aid them.

A spontaneous strike of some 2,000 celery workers broke out in January, 1967, when 30 workers walked off their jobs because their employer refused to increase wages from $1.15 to $1.35 an hour. Irven Lee Dawkins, the workers' spokesman, said, "We want the farmers to sit down and talk with us." Another striker added, "We want the better things in life, just like the farmers. We see how people live on television—and we are people, too."[21]

Three months later 9,200 corn and bean harvesters in Belle Glade and Pahokee struck under the leadership of Local 1242 of the United Packinghouse Workers. After the workers' demands were agreed upon at a rally on April 2, a delegation took their requests to a private meeting of growers, only to be turned away. Union representative Michael D. Lozoff then called the strike.

The independent militancy of the workers lends urgency to the organizing campaign. With and without outside help, Florida workers are declaring for unionization.

Agricultural Workers Local 1242
United Packinghouse, Food & Allied Workers, AFL-CIO
P.O. Box 4274
Winter Haven, Florida 33880

New Jersey

Although the largest agricultural concern in New Jersey, Seabrook Farms, has been unionized for many years, many growers in that state are intolerant of change. "No Trespassing" signs suddenly appeared all over Cumberland County during the summer of 1966, directed not only at Industrial Union Department (AFL-CIO) organizers who were signing up workers, but also at antipoverty workers developing child care centers and other services for migrants. A major grower, Louis Pizzo, who was also a member of the Governor's Migrant Labor Board, was quoted as saying, ". . . there's no place on this farm for anyone with a union card—and I've told my people as much. . . . If I have to deal with a union, I'll shut the whole damn place down. You can't run a farm

Hon. *Clifford P. Case* U.S. Senator (New Jersey)

I know of no reason why farm labor should be denied the protection afforded industrial and other workers by the National Labor Relations Act. Quite the contrary, perhaps more than any other group, farm workers by the circumstances surrounding their employment need the protection of that Act in their efforts to organize and bargain collectively.

with unionization." Pizzo had earlier shouted at VISTA volunteers, "See those people in the field, well, they're nothing, I tell you, nothing. They never were nothing, they never will be nothing, and you and me and God Almighty ain't going to change them."[22]

The 1966 organizing efforts demonstrated the need for uncovering the natural leaders among the workers, and for training them in union organizing. This requirement, for leadership to emerge from the ranks of the workers themselves, is nowhere more necessary than in areas such as New Jersey, where labor is seasonal, and migrant patterns demand equally mobile worker-leaders. Plans are being made for the summer of 1967 to begin the painstaking task of laying the ground work necessary for a full-scale successful organizing drive.

New York

In New York, as in other states using farm labor, basic economic issues are clouded by racial and ethnic prejudice. The thousands of Puerto Rican and Negro workers who pour in to harvest New York's crops face high rents, discrimination, and housing so poor that three farm workers have burned to death in the state within a recent seven month period.

In Brocton in western New York, a fire killed two Puerto Rican migrants in September, 1966. The fire spread from the old, potbellied, wood-burning stove in the tractor shed in which the workers lived. Worse housing conditions were discovered in migrant labor camps toured by a joint legislative committee a week after the fire. Don Hillegas, a student leader of the nearby Fredonia chapter of Campus Americans for Democratic Action reported: "Many of the workers actually live in chicken coops and deserted garages. I have seen the housing inspectors tell the owners 'clean them up or get the people out' but that same inspector never pays a second visit and conditions remain the same."[23]

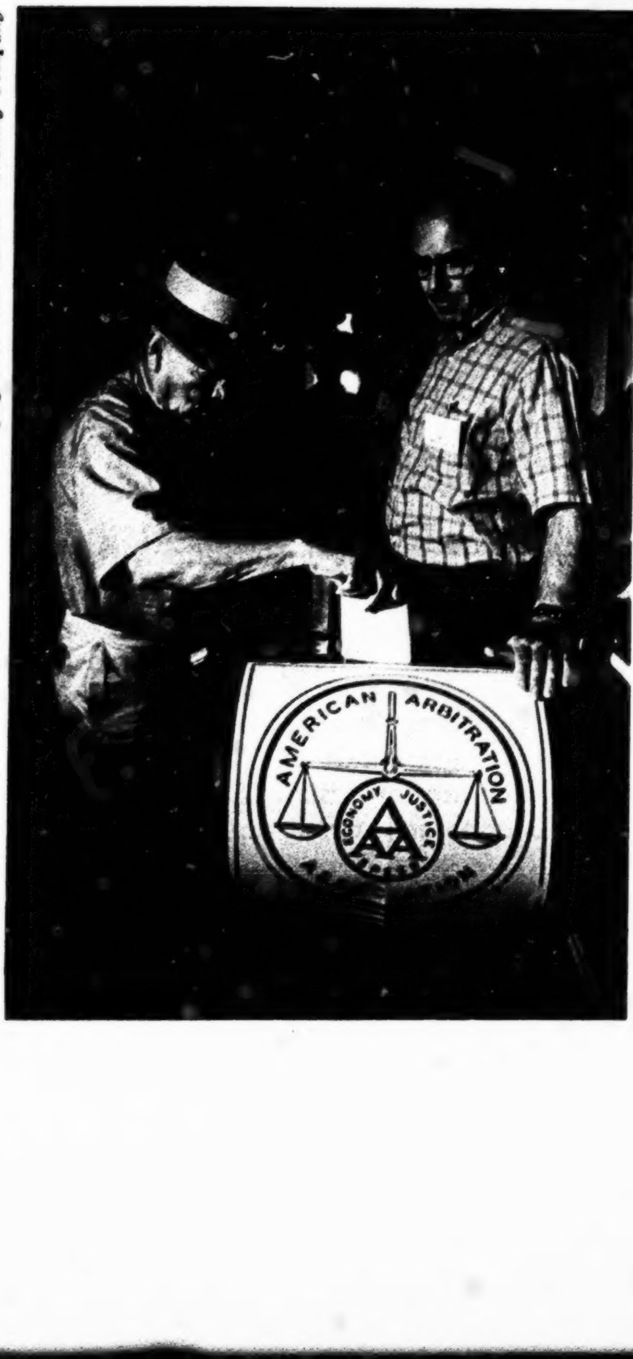
Truman Moore Author of The Slaves We Rent

I don't know any way to overstate the importance of a farm labor union. I can't remember being more saddened than when I saw the NFWA and AWOC working separately in 1963. I think these two forces that are now working together will break the solid big grower front all the way across the land. The building of viable farm labor unions need no longer be viewed another gallant lost cause.

I think once the unions are established growers will prefer their reliable and responsible handling of the essential labor needed at harvest. I think the consumer will be relieved of the sense of guilt he must live with in knowing that the food on his table was put there by people living under ghetto conditions.

Another fire occurred on March 12, 1967, in Wayland, fifty miles from Rochester. Farm worker Willie Odom was burned to death in a migrant camp. Just three days earlier AFL-CIO regional director Michael Mann had spoken at a meeting of the Rochester AFL-CIO Council, which will join in the projected statewide campaign to organize farm workers. "They are the last remnants of slave labor in our own backyard," said Mann.[24]

The *Labor News*, a publication of the Rochester AFL-CIO, wrote: "The late Willie Odom never had a union. No one ever asked him to join a union. No one gave a damn about him and he died a hopeless death just as he lived a hopeless life. . . ." In a plea for unionizing farm workers, the article concluded, "The job must be done—Willie Odom's life and his death ought to go for something."[25]



Photograph by Ted Streshinsky © 1967 The Curtis Publishing Company

In historic election, California farm worker votes on union representation.

UFWOC won.

HOW YOU CAN HELP WIN COLLECTIVE BARGAINING COVERAGE FOR FARM WORKERS

A coalition group (of which the National Advisory Committee on Farm Labor is a member) has established the National Campaign for Agricultural Democracy solely for the purpose of working for the passage of national collective bargaining legislation for farm workers. The National Campaign for Agricultural Democracy (headquarters: 110 Maryland Avenue, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002) has as Director the Rev. Gene Boutilier, who was for nine months boycott chairman of the National Farm Workers Association in Delano; NCAD's field office (1800 Jackson Street, Golden, Colorado 80401) is headed by the Rev. Jack Alford, formerly area Director, Migrant Ministry of the National Council of Churches.

For this campaign to be successful, support must come from private citizens. Here is how you can contribute to the overall effort:

1. Write now to your Congressman and Senators stating your position on bills extending NLRA coverage to agricultural employees.

2. Write to NACFL (112 East 19th Street, New York, N. Y. 10003) if you wish to receive regular mailings regarding the progress of this legislation. Be sure to ask that your name be added to our "action" list as well, if you want to be notified at critical points when action is needed in support of the bills.

3. Place church, labor, civic or civil rights organizations on record by resolution or vote as advocating passage of this legislation. If your organization does not take positions on legislation, ask its members to advocate the principle that all Americans, including farm workers, should have the equal protection of law in deciding whether they wish to join an association for collective bargaining. Send a copy of your action to the National Advisory Committee on Farm Labor and the National Campaign for Agricultural Democracy.

4. Create state or regional coalitions of organizations and groups to advocate NLRA extension. If a coalition concerned about farm labor issues exists in your area, strengthen it and place collective bargaining legislation as the highest priority on its action agenda.

5. Support local organizing efforts; in addition to joining demonstrations and marches, contribute funds and basic necessities to maintain workers where they are on strike. (See addresses given at the end of preceding sections on current organizing efforts.)

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The National Advisory Committee on Farm Labor is a voluntary, nonprofit organization whose purpose is to gather and disseminate information about the conditions and problems of farm workers, and about farm labor practices and policies.

Through public education on a nationwide scale the Committee seeks to mobilize public opinion and to spark effective action by concerned groups and individuals.

Such action has been enhanced by a number of broadly representative state citizens' committees on farm labor, organized with the help of NACFL. These committees have played an active role in proposing much-needed reforms in state and local farm labor conditions, and have introduced and developed support for both state and federal legislation. To extend these vital activities additional state committees will be formed.

You may write to the NACFL for more information on this subject, for a list of other literature available, and for names and addresses of other groups concerned with this issue.

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